DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 991 CE 070 383

AUTHOR	Miller, Carolyn; And Others
TITLE	Learning Styles and Facilitating Reflection. Researching Professional Education. Research Reports Series.
INSTITUTION	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, London.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-946810-55-9
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	73p.
AVAILABLE FROM	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, Publications Dept., Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London, England W1P 0HA, United Kingdom (15 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cognitive Style; *Critical Thinking; *Educational Needs; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Needs Assessment; *Nursing Education; Postsecondary Education; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	*Reflective Thinking; United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

A study focused on how British students reflected on their experience of the nursing diploma of higher education (Dip. HE) programs and on how teachers perceived students' reflective activity and facilitated their associated learning needs. The main methods of collecting data about experiences and perceptions of learning contexts were interviewing and participant observation, supplemented by documentary evidence. Two case study centers were chosen--one on its first intake of Dip. HE students and another with 3 years' experience of Dip. HE. Findings indicated that the formal use of "reflection" was new to a number of established teachers and most students. Teachers emphasized the hope that reflection would increase understanding, develop self-awareness, enhance the ability to analyze, encourage deeper thinking, and promote independence. The settings teachers were using to facilitate reflection were chiefly group sessions, individual tutorials, clinical interactions, and learning journals. Teachers described and illustrated a sequence of four stages of reflection in helping students to link theory and practice: describing aspects of their practical experience, analyzing them, understanding how the situation could have been different, and seeing how they could behave in a future similar occurrence. Students talked about the value of support from their peer group. (Appendixes include a 17-item biblliography, and interview schedules. Contains 51 references.) (YLB)

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Learning Styles and Facilitating Reflection

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RESEARCHING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

A series from the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Learning Styles and Facilitating Reflection

Carolyn Miller
Anne Tomlinson
Margaret Jones

Institute of Continuing and Professional Education,
University of Sussex
and
Sussex and Kent Institute, Ashdown House,
University of Sussex

London, 1994

Published by
The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting,
Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 0HA
Telephone: 0171 388 3131

© English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, 1994

ISBN 0 946810 55 9

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Jill Rogers Associates, Cambridgeshire

Design by Sadler, Suffolk

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Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for one year, from April 1993 to March 1994.

Research such as this would be impossible without the active assistance of the members of the nurse education institutions studied. We are most grateful to the educational managers, nurse teachers and students in the case study centres who generously gave their time and contributed so much to the research.

We should also like to thank the Steering Group for their help in guiding the project and for their interest and support.

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Note: The Pre-registration Nursing Diploma of Higher Education Programmes, known colloquially as 'Project 2000', will be referred to throughout this report as the Dip. HE.

Foreword

The English National Board is pleased to publish this report in its new series 'Researching Professional Education'.

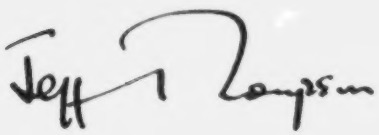
The purpose of this new series is to make the results and implications of research commissioned by the Board readily available to the key stakeholders: to policy makers, managers, practitioners, researchers and educators. The Board intends to enable these groups to have ready access to important research findings from which to plan and implement developments in nursing, midwifery and health visiting education.

The Board's research programme is planned to ensure that education for practice is relevant both professionally and academically. Research based evidence provides an important dimension for the development of policy.

The Board has accepted this report and is undertaking work, based on the findings and recommendations, to develop its educational policy. The Board hopes that educators, managers, practitioners, researchers and policy makers will work together in partnership to develop appropriate learning styles and reflective practice for students.

Maureen Theobald

Chair, English National Board



Jeff Thompson, CBE

Chair, Research and Development Group, English National Board

London, 1994

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1.1 Background to the report

The work described in this report was prompted by the view that much of the research on learning styles carried out in education within the last twenty years needs rethinking if it is to have practical relevance to current needs in nursing education. A critical examination of some of this research showed that it promises more than it can deliver in terms of ready transferability to the classroom. The Pre-registration Nursing Diploma of Higher Education (Dip. HE) 'classroom', furthermore, is a considerably broader learning milieu than the usual college classroom, including as it does community and hospital settings. If nurse teachers are to be encouraged to give further attention to the learning styles of students, then the definition of learning styles needs to broaden in concept to do justice to the intended outcomes of Dip. HE education.

Practitioners in both nursing and education are frequently criticised for ignoring research findings. It is all too often the case in higher education that research is not applied because it is not sufficiently grounded in the practical realities of teaching and learning to be useful. In this research we have been concerned to link learning styles to the realities of teaching and learning, both in how the problem is defined and in the methodology for tackling it. To do this, we began by examining three areas:

- the expected outcomes for Dip. HE students and their associated learning needs
- the problems with 'learning styles' revealed by previous research
- a wider definition of the concept and utility of learning styles within Dip. HE teaching which includes learning to integrate theory and practice through reflection.

These three areas are discussed below.

Dip. HE students and their learning needs

The intended outcome of Project 2000 programmes is to produce critical, problem-solving, autonomous professionals, knowledgeable doers, who are able to respond flexibly to different situations (UKCC, 1986). The learning processes associated with the curriculum are intended to be those of the adult learner: growth through reflecting on experience (Schön, 1983; Boud *et al*, 1985; Powell, 1989; Akinsanya, 1990) and the development of self-direction and independent thought. This is in line with the shift in emphasis underpinning the philosophy of Project 2000 programmes from the apprenticeship model of nursing education into the broader based academic model of higher education. Colleges of nursing are now either already incorporated into higher education institutions or about to become so. The transition from one model to another highlights the need to understand the likely learning problems of pre-registration nurse students and to examine the nature of the 'higher education model' into which they will be integrated.

Preliminary evaluation of Dip. HE courses has been carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Leonard and Jowett, 1990; Jowett *et al*, 1991 and 1994). Feedback from tutors has indicated that students can experience difficulties, not only academically, but also with adjusting to the autonomy expected of them and with undergoing practical experience that differs from their expectations. Their problems can be related to gaps in their past academic experience, to weaknesses in their study skills and to a clash between their expectations of what is involved in becoming a nurse and the reality. Mismatches of

expectations of this kind are by no means exclusive to nurse students; they are found amongst students in higher education in a number of academic disciplines, including other professional subjects such as law and social work. Students have to readjust their expectations in order to come to terms with a broader and more complex view of their professional area of study. This adjustment is a significant aspect of their learning (Miller, 1987). In nurse education, the different environments in which students work mean that the element of adjustment and integration of ideas from one context to another is a particularly significant aspect of their learning.

The readjustment of students' expectations, together with other contextual and environmental factors, is seen as increasingly important in the research literature in higher education. This is well illustrated by the extensive work on learning styles carried out by Entwistle and his colleagues (Entwistle and Hounsell, 1975; Entwistle and Wilson, 1970; 1977; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983). In the period between 1975 and 1983 a clear shift can be seen in their work; they move away from focusing on the learning styles of students as a way of understanding and enhancing their learning, towards looking at the significance of the learning context and students' perceptions of it. This shift in the research arose because of the problems and inconsistencies in the definition and application of learning styles. If nurse education is to avoid these pitfalls, then the problems have to be addressed and the concept of learning styles developed. This is discussed in the next section.

Research on learning styles

Much of the work which has been carried out in higher education on the characteristics of the individual learner has been for the purposes of predicting which students will be 'good learners' at university and – often of more significance – which of them will not. Good learners were defined in terms of their academic success in examinations. Entwistle's extensive research provides an example of this approach. His work on learning styles stems from his dissatisfaction with earlier research he carried out in the 1960s to discover significant variables in student learning. In this early phase the student learner was defined primarily in terms of five main categories deriving from the psychometric tradition of the first half of the century. These were:

- intellectual ability
- personality (such as extroversion–introversion and neuroticism)
- values (political and moral)
- study habits (usually timing and planning of work)
- motivation (wanting to be successful).

There were problems with the interpretation of the interaction of these variables and the difficulty of translating them into practice. After major studies using batteries of tests (e.g. the Eysenck Personality Inventory, the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values, verbal and mathematical aptitude scales (Sainsbury) and details of background, study habits and attitudes), and although the studies 'used a wide range of measures, many of which showed relationships with academic performance', Entwistle and Wilson concluded that:

> *'Again the correlations, both simple and multiple, were too low to claim much progress . . .'*

and further that:

> *'. . . the difficulty we found in extrapolating our statistical results into the real world of lecturers and students is not uncommon, but it is an indictment of the traditional preoccupations of educational researchers.'*
>
> *Entwistle and Wilson, 1977*

It was these difficulties which led to the change of direction in research in the mid-seventies towards taking account of the student's behaviour as he or she responds to a course. In this phase of research, the emphasis shifted to the learning tasks and the student's motives and strategies in tackling them; students were seen to act in response to circumstances with deliberate, different strategies rather than as their personality and intellectual ability might dictate. One example is the work of Pask on 'holist' and 'serialist' learners (Pask and Scott, 1972; and Pask, 1976): the serialist approaches a learning task step by step, whilst the holist conceptualises the task as a whole. Another example is Marton's work on classifying students as 'deep level' processors who read texts to understand the meaning, and 'surface level' processors who rely on a reproductive, rote-learning approach (Marton, 1976; Marton and Saljo, 1976). Biggs' 'reproductive' and 'transformational' strategies (Biggs, 1970, 1976) provide a third example: the student who uses 'reproductive' strategies gives back prescribed material 'intact'. The student using 'transformational' strategies 'ranges widely over material and injects his own meanings and interpretations'. There is some degree of overlap between the concepts behind these three sets of categories. For example, 'deep processing' is akin to the 'transformational' strategy and to the comprehension process of the 'holists'.

These different, but sometimes overlapping, definitions highlight a key problem: that of defining what learning styles are based on. Each researcher has come up with a different conceptualisation of 'style'. A learning style may be more the researcher's construct than the student's.

There is a second problem: a learning style implies a consistency of approach on the part of the student. The introduction of measures of styles through test inventories means that students must show a particular type of behaviour consistently in order to be categorised. There is debate, however, about whether students have a particular, characteristic approach to learning tasks, or whether they have a repertoire of approaches which they use strategically at an opportune time, depending on the context. For example, Laurillard (1978) confirmed Marton's (1976) findings of the differences between students in terms of surface processing and deep processing; but she also found that individuals could switch from one to the other depending on the goals they had in mind for carrying out the task. Marton (1976) himself argued that both context and content determine the approach adopted. Pask (1976), however, believed that his holist and serialist strategies stemmed from distinct learning styles, and that some students showed a predisposition to adopt holist strategies even when the task in hand required serialist processes.

Not only are consistent styles debatable, but they may also be incompatible with the reality of students' learning responses in a complex environment. The basis of the psychometric method used by Entwistle throughout his work is the search for consistent factors that are generalisable; generalisable both in terms of the individual student's behaviour in different learning situations, and in terms of the general applicability of the factors over large numbers of students:

> *'In attempting to measure approaches, however, there is an assumption that students will exhibit sufficient consistency in intention and process across broadly similar academic tasks to justify measuring it as a dimension . . . Elsewhere (Entwistle, 1979) it has been suggested that both consistency and variability can be seen in students' intellectual processes.'*
>
> *Entwistle, Hanley and Hounsell, 1979, p. 367*

However, it is the ability to vary behaviour appropriately, to adjust to circumstances, which is a key element of successful learning. As Entwistle *et al* pointed out later in the same

paper, versatility is the ideal, where students are consistently able to adopt a strategy appropriate to the task and to assimilate their learning to their own interpretations.

It follows, therefore, that it is unproductive to assume or to look for consistent learning styles when the very essence of successful learning is students' ability to use their repertoire of skills adaptively and flexibly. Such flexibility may depend on students' ability to perceive 'correctly' what is wanted in the situation and to adapt their learning accordingly. This brings in a 'strategic component' to student behaviour, in which students choose to tackle a specific learning task in terms of how they perceive its demands; for example, the cue-seeking element of exam behaviour (Miller and Parlett, 1974) and grade point average oriented students (Becker *et al*, 1968). Thus, differences in perceptions of the environment become a significant element in distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful learning. This notion of strategy is difficult to incorporate into a psychometric approach where consistent styles are tested for:

> *'If a strategy is a description of the way a student chooses to tackle a specific learning task in the light of its perceived demands . . . this rules out the possibility of developing any general scale to measure it.'*
>
> *Entwistle, Hanley and Hounsell, 1979, p. 368*

These inadequacies of student 'style' as the major determinant of learning led to a third phase of research, which developed through the eighties. By 1983, Entwistle had moved away from trying to define persistent learning styles and was committed to the importance of learning processes and academic context:

> *'It became clear that greater attention would have to be placed on study processes and on the context, or academic environment, within which students learn.'*
>
> *Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983*

This analysis shifted the research problem to that of defining the features of the learning environment which students perceive as relevant to their learning and as leading to 'appropriate' behaviour. The definition of what is appropriate is in itself problematic. It can be taken to mean what is rewarded by the system in terms of good examination results, but it might also be what is of benefit to the student's own learning, interest in the subject and development. Ideally these two definitions should coincide, but all too often they do not (Miller and Parlett, 1974; Eraut, 1975). A third kind of appropriateness might be a form of short-term coping behaviour which enables the student to deal with learning problems by ignoring or retreating from aspects of the course for a time. To understand how behaviour is appropriate, therefore, it has to be understood in terms of a pattern of student behaviour in response to a changing context, which is differently perceived by different students.

There is one further consideration: how students develop in their approach to learning. The results of Entwistle's psychometric approach have led him to consider the importance of process and context in student learning, but not change and development. The point is made by Perry in his Foreword to Entwistle and Ramsden's book:

> *'Could a certain constellation of learner characteristics represent less an enduring student type and more a moment of evolution in a student's notion of what learning is about?'*
>
> *Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983*

Students' understanding of their development over time, and consequently the ability to learn from changes, is very important.

What emerges from this review of the literature is that the way that students tackle a learning task depends on how they perceive the purposes of the task and the context in which it is carried out. They will approach the task differently when their understanding of context and purpose is different; indeed a flexible response to an accurately perceived situation is the most adaptive. While it is therefore too simplistic to define individuals as having a particular learning style by means of a test or category system, it would make sense to encourage and develop in them a range of adaptive responses based on their own analysis of key elements of the learning situation. This then makes overt their thinking about how they are approaching their learning.

The understanding of individual learning styles is thus broadened, in concept: it becomes the understanding of how students perceive and reflect on their learning environment *and* how those reflections develop over time leading to a broader and more complex range of responses. Such a definition fits well with the philosophy of Project 2000 and the concern with reflective processes in the integration of theory and practice. It is also relevant to what nurse teachers are actually doing on courses as they spend time and effort in helping students to bring together theory and practice. One of the ways in which nurse teachers do this is to talk with students about their practical experiences and help them to make sense of them. In terms of our broader definition of learning styles, they are trying to develop in students a wider range of interpretations so that students can enhance their repertoire of responses next time they are in a similar situation. Increasing our understanding of how students select contextual factors as part of the reflective process will help teachers to facilitate the reflection process. For, while facilitating such processes is important to the success of the Dip. HE, it is not easy. Anecdotal information from teaching teams suggests that blocks of 'reflection', for example in the first year of Dip. HE after community experience, need to be organised with a greater understanding of how to develop students' learning from 'feedback' to consolidation and the further development of learning.

In several ways nursing education is ahead of some institutions of higher education in making use of tools to underpin the reflective process. Specific examples are learning contracts to encourage students to reflect on what their learning needs are, and the use of journals or diaries by students to record critical incidents and experiences for later analysis (e.g. Durgahee, 1992).

Reflection in the Dip. HE

Analysis of the literature and our concern to develop the concept of learning styles so that it is relevant to nursing education, led us to focus on what teachers and students are doing in the process of reflection in the Dip. HE as a productive avenue for the investigation of individual approaches to learning within the broader definition of learning styles developed above. The aim was to do this at two levels: at the 'micro level' of students' reflection on their approach to study skills (Nisbet and Shucksmith, 1986); and at the cultural and organisational level in terms of students' reflection on the wider learning processes in the Dip. HE in linking theory and practice. Specifically, the research questions focused on:

- how *students* reflect on their experience
  - of the study process
  - of the wider elements of their course
- and how their *teachers*
  - perceive the different stages and processes students go through in the reflective activity
  - respond to students' learning needs in this activity.

1.2 Research approach

The intention was that the research should be a small-scale, in-depth exploration of some of the processes of teaching and learning, concentrating on examples of what was being done, with the aim of illuminating the views and experiences of teachers and students on Dip. HE courses. Specifically, the focus was on students as they went through the Common Foundation Programme (CFP). The methodological approaches drawn on were the Illuminative evaluation and research model (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; Miller and Parlett, 1974; Parlett and Dearden, 1977) and the Case Study approach (MacDonald, 1971; Simons, 1980). Both approaches emphasise the importance of the context in which teaching and learning take place and the experiences of staff and students within their work settings. No claims can be made for generalisability of findings from case studies of specific settings. Rather, the researcher attempts to portray the case study from the different standpoints of those within it with sufficient detail for others to judge whether it has relevance to their own situation ('phenomenon recognition', Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

Illuminative evaluation and research is based on three over-arching and related concepts:

- the 'learning milieu'
- the centrality of the views and experiences of those being researched
- respect and value given to the individuals being researched.

1. The learning milieu

Central importance is attached to acknowledging the *context* in which education takes place, and of recognising the influence that it has on learning and teaching. The context – or learning milieu – is:

> *'The social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers work together. The learning milieu represents a network or nexus of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables. These interact in complicated ways to produce, in each class or course, a unique pattern of circumstances, pressures, customs, opinions, and work styles which suffuse the teaching and learning that occur there.'*
>
> *Parlett and Hamilton, 1972, p. 11*

This stress on the need to study the influences of the learning environment has three purposes. First, to emphasise that research and evaluation should not concentrate only on measuring the input and output ends of education at the expense of the intervening processes. Second, to attempt to get closer to the reality of the daily experience of teachers and learners, as opposed to focusing on teaching and learning as they are represented in the overt, formal plans found in the prospectus, timetables and statements of objectives.

The third, implicit, intention is a willingness to grapple with the difficult, idiosyncratic areas that are part of the milieu: departmental personalities and politics; conflicts and clashes of interest; the students' hidden curriculum. The influence of such things can rarely be measured objectively. Nor does attention to them appear to lead to 'generalisable' results. But this is not taken as a reason for ignoring their effects. The researcher aims to portray or shed light on these complexities of the learning milieu because there is no way of providing a clear-cut measure of them. Hence the term 'illuminate'.

Nursing education is in a period of very considerable change at present, both nationally and at the level of institutional re-organisation of the curriculum, staffing and funding. These

changes impact in many different ways on the experiences of staff and students and the research model used must be able to incorporate this.

2. The centrality of the views and experiences of those being researched

Importance is accorded to the *individual's experience* and perception of the context or learning milieu; different people see the context in which they work from different points of view. Not only do staff have different concerns and perspectives from students, but there are individual differences between staff members and between students. The emphasis is on understanding teaching and learning through description and analysis of these different individuals' perceptions and the reasoning behind them. Such a view is based upon the idea of the social construction of reality, as expounded by Berger and Luckmann, 1967.

3. Respect and value given to the individuals being researched

Valuing and respecting those people who are taking part in the research stems directly from the importance that is attached to their experiences and perceptions and the uniqueness of their individual view of the learning milieu. This is in contrast to people being regarded as 'subjects' for the researcher's questions.

1.3 Research methods

The main research methods used in this study to collect data about experiences and perceptions of learning contexts were interviewing and participant observation, supplemented by documentary evidence (timetables, course documents).

Two case study centres were chosen. One of these was on its first intake of Dip. HE students who were still on the Common Foundation Programme (Centre A). The other had three years' experience of Dip. HE courses (Centre B). Taken together, the programmes recruited from a broad band of students with a variety of ages and backgrounds. The centres are described further in section 1.4.

The initial research questions are given at Appendix 1. To address them, the research focused on three kinds of activity:

- study skills sessions at the start of the Dip. HE programme
- reflective journals, with tutorial sessions to discuss them
- reflective meetings – regular group sessions in which students and a tutor or tutors reviewed learning from the practical experiences and related it to theory.

Interviews and group discussions with teachers

Data were collected from teachers in small-group discussions and individual interviews.

Group discussion

In both study centres nurse teachers were invited to attend a group discussion about using reflective processes in teaching and learning. Two of the project team briefly introduced the research topic at the start of the session and then asked the teachers present to give their views of using reflective methods. Full notes were taken.

In Study Centre A, three small-group discussions were held with a total of 17 teachers attending.

In Study Centre B, two discussions were attended by a total of 8 teachers.

The teachers were self-selected and ranged from those who were particularly interested and confident in discussing how they used reflection with students to those who 'did not think

they used it themselves but wanted to hear more about it'. The exchange of views in the groups was lively, with several members commenting on the value of the sharing of different approaches and assumptions. Although those attending had this range of involvement with reflection, there was potential bias in self-selection and we attempted to overcome this in the selection for individual interviews.

Individual interviews

Fifteen individual interviews were undertaken with teachers: 5 in Study Centre A and 10 in Study Centre B. The interview schedule can be found at Appendix 2. The interviews were semi-structured, with a core of open questions covering the teachers' views of reflection and how it was facilitated, helping learners to link theory and practice; the expectations of learners; use made of learning journals. All but one were tape recorded and full notes were taken. The sample was selected to represent the academic disciplines taught (e.g. social and biological sciences) and the clinical specialisms (e.g. midwifery).

In Study Centre B, initial access was gained through teachers involved in interpersonal skills (IPS) teaching. This led to introductions to other tutors and groups ('snowball sampling', Denzin, 1978). Subsequently it was necessary to use purposive sampling (Cohen and Manion, 1980) to select teachers who were not involved with these sessions to avoid bias towards specific subjects or methods. Hence teachers from a wide range of subject and specialist interests were selected. Comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to identify similarities and differences in emerging themes.

Interviews with students

Students were interviewed in groups, although in the original planning of the research we had intended to interview a random sample of students individually in Study Centre A. However, as the first intake of Dip. HE students had just arrived, access to them proved difficult due to the tight programming of lectures and other scheduled events. Students were subsequently based on four sites and contacting individuals and arranging meetings appeared unfeasible. With the co-operation of their teachers, two group interviews were carried out with a total of 23 students, all eight months into training.

In Study Centre B, seven group interviews of 45 students were conducted. Group size varied from 4 to 15 students and four consecutive intakes were randomly sampled. It was felt that sampling from groups at different stages of the CFP would shed further light on general progress and development. Four of the students had recently finished the CFP and entered the adult branch. Many of the students gave up lunch breaks and personal time to accommodate the research. The interview schedule can be found at Appendix 3.

Classroom observations

Observation of classes was undertaken to record how students fed back and discussed their experiences. Two study skills sessions were also observed. Sixteen classroom observations, five in Study Centre 'A', and eleven in Study Centre 'B' were undertaken. Researchers documented fieldnotes of each observation, recording activities and interactions.

Project meetings

These were held regularly throughout the research, with the focus on planning, preparation for interviews and observations, and the sharing and analysis of data collected. Efforts have been made by the project team to use triangulation in order to maximise rigour in data collection and analysis. Data collected were circulated to each team member with subsequent discussion and analysis of the findings.

Figure 1 summarises the number of teachers and students in each study centre as well as the classroom observations undertaken; an overview of the project activities can be found at Appendix 4. A key to the abbreviations used throughout this report when data is referenced can be found at Appendix 5.

	Study Centre A	Study Centre B
Teachers	22	18
Students	Total 23 all 8 months into training	Total 45 6 at 2 months 24 at 6 months 11 at 14 months 4 at 20 months (2 months into adult branch)
Classroom observations	5	11

Figure 1: Overview of sample

1.4 The study centres

Study Centre A

Study Centre A was formed in 1989 with the amalgamation of four schools of nursing and three schools of midwifery linking with a university and a polytechnic – now two neighbouring universities. There were approximately 1,000 students in total, including pre-registration midwifery students, and also an extensive advanced nursing and midwifery department. There were 85 teachers employed to teach all courses.

This study centre began the Dip. HE in June 1993 with 105 students, 81 choosing the adult branch.

Geographically, this Institute of Health Studies served four health authorities, (now eleven NHS Trusts). Three of these health authorities were coastal and one inland. Socio-economically, the area was predominantly agricultural, leisure industry, light industry, science and technology, and service industry, with some commuters to major cities. There were areas of unemployment, underemployment, poverty and transient populations. Being coastal, there were areas which possessed high numbers of retired people. There was minimal ethnic diversity.

The education institution sites are approximately thirty miles apart; the longest journey to the institution base being about forty miles. The students who were resident were based in the health authority of their choice and during the introductory period were transported to the institution daily by coach. There was, therefore, extensive travel both by staff and students.

The Dip. HE curriculum design was developmental and spiral in nature. The developmental strands went from health and prevention to illness; from conception, child and family, young and mature adult to old age; and through the process of nursing with emphasis on assessment early in the course, through planning, implementation and on to evaluation with increasing complexity as the student travelled from the CFP through the chosen branch.

The programme was divided into units; three units in the CFP and three units in each branch. Each unit had a theoretical and practical component. In the first unit, for example, twelve weeks were spent at the institution base, after which eleven weeks were spent in the

community and hospital settings gaining insight into the care of parents and children. These experiences included the maternity unit, the role of the health visitor, play groups and nurseries, local schools, general practitioners, paediatric wards and centres for children who have physical and learning disabilities. During this period students returned to their site base for study days and to review progress. Owing to shortage of accommodation and excessive travel, most teaching and learning after the first unit took place in the health authority of the student's choice.

The management of the teaching and learning in the Dip. HE was under the guidance of a head of department supported by a co-ordinating principal lecturer and four principal lecturers each heading up a team of lecturers in the themes of biomedical studies, health and environmental studies, professional studies and social (contextual) studies. All lecturers had an area of specialist teaching associated with their educational qualification. Most lecturers had first or higher degrees; several were involved in ongoing study, some for doctorates. Each lecturer was also linked to a clinical placement. Each student also had a personal tutor throughout the course. The research started shortly after the first intake of Dip. HE students and many lecturers were still coming to terms with the new organisational structures, specialist teaching, larger groups and increased travelling.

All practice placements were audited as suitable for learning.

Emphasis was placed on students' personal and professional development and their growing willingness to accept responsibility in their professional role:

> *'This will involve the development not only of practical competencies but also interpersonal skills, understanding of clients and their backgrounds, critical self-awareness, a questioning approach, flexibility in thinking, professional dedication and a capacity for self-management.'*
>
> *curriculum document*

There was a programme of continuous assessment of theory and practice with a variety of formative and summative assessments, and:

> *'Students are required to reflect on their experience in practice as an integral part of the assessment process . . .'*
>
> *curriculum document*

Students were encouraged to give formal and informal feedback. Each study week, unit, clinical and community experience was evaluated.

Study Centre B

Study Centre B was formed in 1990 with the amalgamation of two schools of nursing and one school of midwifery with a nearby college of higher education with which the schools of nursing had already developed strong links. The college of nursing and midwifery served two suburban health authorities and had a population of approximately 750 pre-registration students. There was also a well-established professional development department.

Dip. HE training commenced in January 1991 with 95 students, 50 choosing the adult branch. One cohort of students has qualified.

Geographically, the health authorities served a mainly densely populated metropolitan area. Socio-economically, many people commuted to work; light and service industries were well represented. There was a thriving major shopping centre and three major industrial sites. Housing was varied with many houses built in the early 1900s and converted to multiple occupancy in the 1960s. Others were decaying or being renovated. There were areas of affluence

and pockets of poverty. Many cultures were represented amongst the local population and they were reflected amongst the student nurses and staff.

The curriculum design was spiral in nature, with nursing practice at its core. It was intended that students advance from novice, to advanced beginner, to competent in order to qualify, thereafter gaining substantial nursing experience in order to become 'expert' (Benner, 1984).

> *'The student is seen as progressing along a learning continuum from dependence to independence and will be encouraged to reflect, review and consolidate all experiences within the student group.'*
>
> *'It is believed that the educational environment should be conducive to learning and support experimentation, discussion and reflection.'*
>
> *curriculum document, 1990*

The curriculum document advocated an androgogical approach to learning with consideration being given to students' existing knowledge and experience. If students showed evidence of previous identical study, they were allowed to opt out of identified lectures.

The course was divided into nine units – four in the CFP and five in the branch programme. All related subject disciplines were taught in each unit. Theory was related to practice in the CFP by appropriate visits to the community – shops, crèches, play groups, schools, sports centres, voluntary organisations, housing facilities, magistrates court, parliament and so on. The fourth unit formed a 'bridge' between the CFP and the branch programme by demonstrating nursing in a variety of settings. Work experience took place in the branch programmes.

Staff from the college of higher education and the college of nursing and midwifery combined into subject-based teams in order to teach both the theory and practice of nursing and midwifery. These subject bases were nursing studies, biology, interpersonal skills, sociology, social policy, psychology, philosophy and research. Senior lecturers were responsible for the co-ordination of specific courses; for example, one senior lecturer was responsible for the CFP and another for the adult branch. Students were expected to receive a minimum of 20 taught hours a week. The interactional nature of learning was emphasised.

There was a programme of continuous assessment both in theory and practice, with each assessment being designed as appropriate to the subject matter and increasing in complexity as the course progressed.

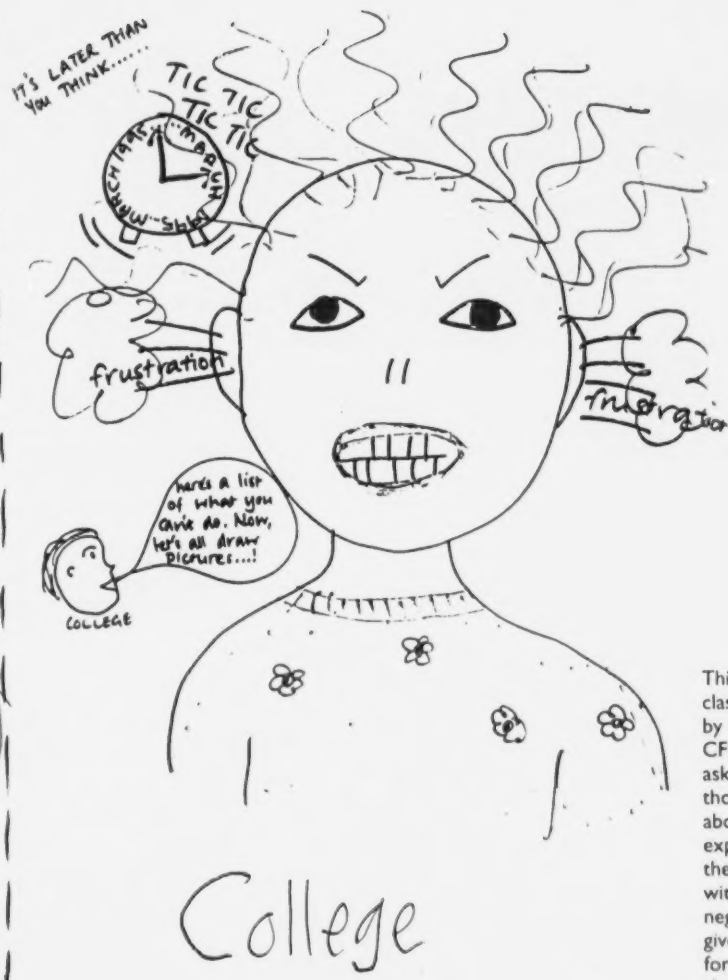
Students were encouraged to give feedback and formal evaluation took place within each unit.

Recent changes

Both study centres shared the political and social turmoil of the last three years. The structural changes which have come about as a result of the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act have meant that health authorities have been competing to become NHS Trusts. Previous large integrated units have changed to become discrete provider units; committees with whom the colleges of nursing interacted at a variety of levels have changed in structure, terms of reference and personnel; the growing market economy in health, social services and education has influenced student placements and student support. Changes have simultaneously taken place in higher education with the removal of the binary system and nurse education becoming part of higher education. Whilst the emphasis in the student nurses' programmes was holism – seeing the patient and their family in their biopsychosocial context,

access to that 'whole' has become increasingly difficult to negotiate. Hence, these radical professional educational changes have taken place in a cultural environment of continual change and uncertainty. Being within this multi-institutional change environment has naturally influenced the research. The research team has been sensitive to these changes and it has been difficult at times to gain access and to remain focused upon the research remit (Wilde, 1992) where staff are concerned about their jobs and the impact of reorganisation on the delivery of the curriculum.

20


IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK.....
TIC TIC TIC TIC
frustration
here's a list of what you can't do. Now, let's all draw pictures...!
COLLEGE
College

This picture is taken from classroom work produced by students at the end of CFP. Small groups were asked to DRAW their thoughts and feelings about their recent ward experiences. Each group then shared their drawing with others. Positive and negative examples were given, possible strategies for coping discussed, with the teacher's contribution focussing on how change could be achieved.

SCB.CO.7

21

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2.1 Study skills and exploring learning styles

The curriculum documents of both study centres included a focus on preparation for study. In Study Centre A, there was a formal, organised study skills package which had been devised and produced by the teaching team. It included:

- preparation for study
- notetaking
- reading
- learning and memory
- using the library
- tips in relation to written work
- participation in seminars/tutorials
- good study habits
- indicative reading.

At the beginning of unit 1 there were formal sessions on study skills. Two of these sessions were observed.

In the first session the different approaches to study in secondary and tertiary education were discussed. The key points emphasised were that tertiary learning is not teacher-led, that students manage their own learning and that knowledge is uncertain. The study skills package was discussed; note-taking and self-organisation were explored. The students then completed a Learning Styles Inventory (Honey and Mumford, 1986) and identified their main learning perspectives as a possible combination of activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist.

At the second session their findings were discussed within their group and they were encouraged to expand their approaches to learning. It was emphasised to students that no one learning style was to be aimed for. Suggestions were made about different approaches which may be appropriate in the many different contexts of nurse training – lectures, small-group work, syndicate work, visits and practical experiences. Lastly, they were introduced to the idea of keeping a learning log which would help them to relate, reinforce, reflect upon, integrate and apply their learning. Information regarding their learning styles was then reviewed and passed on to their personal tutor in order that their individual approaches could be reconsidered throughout the programme. Learning contracts and learning journals were an integral part of the programme.

According to the curriculum document of Study Centre B, within unit 1, section 1, at the beginning of the programme, 10 hours were dedicated to study skills. The content included:

- learning theories
- learning needs
- teaching/learning styles
- use of learning resources
- use of learning contracts

- reading, writing and taking notes
- comparing and contrasting
- questioning
- developing critical awareness
- group discussion
- self-directed learning.

> *'Students will be exposed to role play and games in order to identify their own learning styles'*
>
> *SCB curriculum document, 1990*

Recommendations about study skill books and guidance for further reading were given and learning journals were used:

> *'In addition, students will record learning experiences in a learning journal/diary . . . This will show personal development, the acquisition of skills and how these are applied to nursing practice. This will also assist students to gain insight into their strengths and limitations and hence identify means to enhance learning and improve weak areas.'*
>
> *curriculum document, 1991*

There was diversity amongst the teaching team as to how individual teachers worked and what different groups of students received. One teacher mentioned the use of a learning styles questionnaire which was a personal adaptation of the Honey and Mumford (1986) Learning Styles Inventory:

> ***'When we do learning support skills, we ask the student to participate in a questionnaire which identifies learning styles.'***
>
> SCB.TL5

Students were also encouraged to keep reflective journals and had a general introduction to their use and value.

In both study centres it was expected that teachers would use the personal tutorial to explore the student's progress in mastering the use of the library and managing their own increasingly independent study.

Response to study skills and learning styles input

In Study Centre A, students' reactions to the study skills input were positive:

Student 1: ***'When we started we went through the pack as an introduction. The teachers have referred to different sections at appropriate times . . . A lot of people found it useful in essay writing.'***

Student 2: ***'For referencing the Harvard way.'***

Student 1: ***'There's a bit in it about "how we learn" [learning and memory] which is very useful.'***

Student 3: ***'And the parts on the "spider" diagram [line diagrams].'***

SCA.SI.1.2

Students at Study Centre A said that they would have liked more about revision in their package. They also said that if they were to recommend one thing to new students wishing to start the programme, they would recommend that they master study skills before joining.

Some students commented on the learning styles inventory, the purpose it served and the effect of being classified in a category:

Student 1: *'My tutor discussed it [the inventory] with me, as I came out as being reflective. His advice was to do a reflective diary so that I can reflect on my work.'*

Student 2: *'I think I have discovered my own learning style. It never said I was a reflectionist and I know I do reflect and analyse but there were things from the other groups I do as well 'cos I've learnt. I think that people should be aware of the learning styles but I think that grid [four types of learning styles] just categorised you. I don't trust those types of tests.'*

SCA.SI.2

This raises questions about how such inventories were perceived. The teachers' thinking behind the use of inventories was not so much to categorise individuals as to help them to develop flexible approaches to learning. It may be the teachers' intentions to convey this to students, and this may be stressed when they are used, but it also seems important to encourage questioning over the construction of these tools and to be aware of the scepticism noted in the example above. It is equally important to recognise and actively to encourage the development of a range of approaches to study. If a student shows a leaning toward a reflective approach, what should the teacher be encouraging? Is it more helpful to make use of a skill which the student already possesses or to suggest alternative approaches?

Fourteen to eighteen months into training, many students in Study Centre B had only vague recollections of the study skills preparation, although some remembered things they found helpful:

'I can't remember much of the study skills session.'

'I think it should be optional.'

SCB.SI.6

'I think we had a half-hour session.'

'I don't remember the handbook.'

'Something about don't study for more than about half an hour.'

'When you read you should write it down, preferably in note form or highlight it.'

'Using index cards was suggested.'

'Don't leave revision too late.'

SCB.SI.7

'We had something on organising ourselves and time management, some techniques were very helpful.'

SCB.SI.5

On the learning styles inventory students' comments varied and memories were fading:

'We didn't get anything on learning styles.'

SCB.SI.6

'A questionnaire identified if we were practical, imaginative and two others [categories].'

'It was too early.'

'It was helpful to point out there were other ways of learning.'

'Other options open.'

'Common sense really.'

SCB.SI.5

Both institutions recognised the importance of study skills and devoted time to it. Their content and recommended reading was similar. Study Centre A's teachers supported their classroom sessions with a study skills package which students used when they felt they needed it and to which teachers referred. They also emphasised the different nature of study in higher education and the uncertainty of knowledge, preparing their students for greater independence of action and thought. The students entered the Dip. HE through a variety of educational portals – some with degrees, some with Advanced levels or equivalent, some with GCSE and some with the DC Test, a specially designed entrance test. Their ages also varied. The ability to study independently is a recognised higher education transferable skill. However, it is neither acquired easily nor quickly. A study skills package which is followed up, referred to and reinforced in the first year was perceived as very useful by a majority of students. However, the follow-up needs to be planned in, otherwise study skills sessions remain yet another one-off feature of an induction programme.

2.2 Teachers' definitions of reflection

Many teachers expressed an interest in, and the intention to use, 'reflection' and 'reflective processes' in their teaching. However, these meant different things to different teachers and came with a correspondingly varied set of attitudes, both positive and negative. Some teachers expressed caution over the wholesale adoption of reflection as a learning strategy. One expressed this concern by saying:

'I think that sometimes we can easily be found guilty of moving with any new trend . . . anything that is an "in thing", we think everybody must move into it and then everything else is discarded. But I think it's moving carefully and allowing people to find their own level.'

SCA.TI.6.5

In Study Centre A, teachers seemed to be operating in a context of uncertainty, perhaps partly due to being comparatively new to teaching the Dip. HE. Their concerns were related to: how does one define reflection? who does it? how do they do it? where is it done? creating a safe environment; and the role of reflection in integrating nursing into higher education.

In Study Centre B, teachers had been teaching the Dip. HE students since January 1991. In this centre the complexities of managing several Dip. HE cohorts were still being wrestled with.

There were differences in how teachers in both centres defined reflection. They said that several theorists guided their thinking (e.g. Berne; Dewey; Heron; Schön; Jarvis; Mezirow; Rogers; Tuckman).

Two aspects to teaching were identified:

- retrospective – using an open forum approach where there is an off-loading, after the event, of issues, feelings, concerns and shared experiences regarding critical incidents

- proactive – where purposeful activity aims to facilitate the attribution of meaning to events through utilising theories or categories of theories, e.g. applied psychology and interpersonal skills.

The following extracts highlight the variety in teachers' definitions of reflection:

> ***'To me reflection means a lot of things. It's definitely a process as far as I'm concerned. It involves different stages – retrospection, introspection – it involves expressing your feelings, and analysing it. There should be a critical element in it, but it's also got an experiential part – not only feelings, but in what context did it happen, and what were the experiences that came out of it, and what kind of learning did you gain from it . . . I quite like the definition of Dewey. He said reflection is attending to the grounds of a belief . . . The other one I like is Mezirow.'***
>
> SCA.TL4.1

> ***'My idea of reflection is to take a series of events and look back on them and analyse them and see . . . what they [the students] can gain from the experience . . . the one that comes to mind is the student who's been an emergency admission to hospital for an operation and what she'd learnt about being on the other side of the bedclothes and how that will affect her delivery of care to other patients.'***
>
> SCB.TL1.1

> ***'I think of reflection as having a relationship with your own mind. Identifying your own strengths and building on weaknesses'.***
>
> SCB.TL2.1

The element of reflection which most concerned teachers was the discussion of 'feelings'. For some this was the great strength of reflection: it allowed students to explore how their feelings influenced their work as students and as nurses, thus increasing their self-awareness and helping them to grow as professionals.

They described how they ensured the safety of students so as to minimise the possibility of them being left hurt and vulnerable after the analysis of a difficult experience. These teachers also identified how they would like 'expert' help to develop their skills as facilitators further. One teacher felt strongly that teachers themselves need to be able to demonstrate reflective skills:

> ***'I think teachers need reflective skills, definitely, they must have reflective skills, because if they don't have, it actually means that they are short-changing the students . . . so I think they should have a comprehensive repertoire of different skills.'***
>
> SCA.TL6.5

A second group of teachers thought that the risks of uncovering hidden emotions during reflection sessions and not being able to deal with them properly were too great for them to want to take part. They worried about teachers stepping in unaware and insufficiently prepared.

A third group of teachers appeared to be facilitating reflection in their students without using that term or identifying their teaching in that way. When these teachers took part in project group discussions they experienced a growing sense of relief that what others were describing was similar to what they did in helping students:

'Before I started to think about this a few months ago, I probably would have said I don't use reflection. It's not a technique as such that I use. Then when I started to think about what it is I think I realised that I do.'

SCA.TI.2.1

The term 'reflection' had put off some teachers who perceived it as the latest 'new speak':

'The word "reflection" itself can be de-skilling, and "helping skills", or "making sense of a process", are friendlier ways of putting the same thing.'

SCA.TI.5.FN.1

This group illustrated the fuzzy boundary between 'ordinary teaching' and reflection. They felt the skills of facilitating reflection were not confined to sessions called 'reflection' but were built into some people's teaching style or ways of helping students. Like other things professionals do, they get on with it without giving it a name, and may be resistant – rather than relieved – to having part of their work defined in a particular way. Jarvis (1992) notes the difference between teaching students to think and teaching them to reflect. Boyd and Fales define reflection as:

'The process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective.'

Boyd and Fales, 1983

Atkins and Murphy (1993) comment on the lack of definition and clarity about the concept of reflection in their review of the literature. In the following section teachers describe how they saw the role of reflection in learning.

2.3 Teachers' aims when facilitating reflection

All the teachers interviewed had clear ideas about how they hoped learners would develop through the use of reflection. Some of these were stated quite loosely in general terms:

'I aim to help students to have a deeper understanding and raise their awareness.'

SCA.TI.5.FN

'It's important for learners to analyse critical incidents, examine their own responses, and others' behaviour. This can lead to raising questions and developing alternative strategies.'

SCA.GI.1.FN

Others gave specific examples of the types of change they would like to see. One group described these changes in relation to the theories which guided their thinking:

'We aim to encourage independence. Learners are introduced to theories of independence, transference and TA [Transactional Analysis]. We encourage movement from child to adult, and toward adult to adult interactions and expression of mutual needs, although there is focus on the process rather than the product.'

SCB.GI.FN

Students may need help to move from one level to another:

'Reflection, sometimes, if you're not careful can be very superficial, and you're looking on the surface things, there are deeper issues that we may not be prepared to disclose, or may not be realising, then you need to actually deepen [the level of reflection].'

SCA.TL4.5

Teachers described ways in which they hoped learners would develop along a number of continua. From an analysis of the interviews these were the dimensions of change they anticipated:

From	To
Accepting	*Questioning*
Intolerant	*Tolerant*
Lacking respect	*Respectful*
Dismissive	*Valuing*
Concrete thinking	*Abstract thinking*
Doing	*Thinking*
Reactive	*Reflective*
Impulsive	*Diplomatic*
Being descriptive	*Analytical*
Quick to judge	*Cautious*
Seeing things in black and white	*Shades of grey*
Seeking help with problems	*Problem solving*
Being very reserved	*More open*
Dependence	*Independence*
Immature	*Mature*
Unassertive	*Assertive*
Lacking self awareness	*Self aware*
Unskilled communicators	*Skilled communicators*

SCA.GI2.FN, SCB.GI1.FN, SCB.TL2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10

There may be a danger in seeing these dimensions as only moving in one direction, but that implication was not intended; there was recognition that movement in terms of development could be in both directions. It may be just as important, for example, for an assertive student to recognise and develop strategies for holding back as to move towards more assertiveness. In the same way, people who have a tendency to be thinkers may need to develop strategies to aid them into action.

Although these aims were held by many teachers, the extent to which they could be achieved was thought to depend to some extent on the personality, quality and skills of the learner.

Teachers' aims also related to teaching activities and the learning opportunities they offered. They felt students were more able to bring personal experiences and share them in reflective sessions where an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, honesty, openness, sharing,

support and encouragement existed. This required the use of skills which teachers felt needed to be developed:

> ***'Patience, I think that's the main one you need, patience and encouragement, and also the interpersonal skills – being open, being approachable, showing that the student's contribution is valued however minor or major that contribution might be; not showing favouritism, being seen to be fair within the group – I think those are the main skills.'***
>
> SCB.TI.1.7

In order to offer these conditions some teachers felt they needed counselling skills, experience in facilitating groups and time to explore the issues that arise. They aimed to provide the optimum conditions for the process to work, through the use of various teaching strategies.

2.4 Teachers' strategies for linking theory with practice

Nursing is a practice-based profession which requires the learner not only to acquire a wide range and depth of knowledge, but also to be able to apply that knowledge when working with clients in numerous care settings. To enable students to make the transition from novice to expert, linking theory with practice, it is important to encourage both intellectual curiosity and critical thinking.

Teaching strategies for achieving these aims were identified in the respective curriculum documents and policies. This can present a dilemma for teachers who, on the one hand, have to work within a prescribed curriculum and, on the other, need to make autonomous choices from a wide range of teaching methods. It is therefore not surprising that the strategies which were seen as important and were said to be used most frequently by the greatest number of teachers, were those identified in the documents. Analysis of the interviews showed the following strategies to be important to teachers: small-group work, one-to-one tutorials, working with students in clinical practice and learning journals.

The value of small-group work

There were many examples from the data which highlighted the value of small-group work. Teachers felt that the process of reflection which encourages the linking of theory with practice requires skilled handling and can best be achieved either in small groups or individual tutorials due to the sensitive nature of the issues raised and the need to respect students' privacy:

> ***'It's hard moving them [students] from description to delving deeper, finding out why . . . it's difficult to do that in a big group, you need small groups.'***
>
> SCB.TI.4.2

> ***'The safest place to do it is in the interpersonal skills sessions because the groups are small; they know each other better, and they deal with it better. There is more chance of dealing with the issue there and then, than in a session when you have a group of thirty people.'***
>
> SCB.TI.10.10

One teacher noted the value of small groups in enabling an increased understanding of students as individuals:

> ***'I would start off initially getting them in very small groups to contribute as they feel able, to enable them to feel safe and build up the trust within the group, and the ground rules that there should be trust. What I find is that students will share and on occasions the information they share gives you a remarkable insight into the person that you wouldn't have had otherwise. Because you're giving them permission to be entitled to their opinions and values and share within a safe environment, you find they are able to do so.'***
>
> SCB.TI.3

Opportunities for teachers to gain insights into individual students is essential to their ability to recognise individual learning needs.

The size of intakes into the Dip. HE in both study centres made the successful management of small groups extremely challenging. The availability of rooms, the number of teachers free to teach or the need to repeat the same session on numerous occasions drained increasingly scarce resources. There was also a recognition amongst teachers that the processes they were encouraging required skilled handling:

> ***'I think you need much smaller groups of people. I also think you need expert, experienced people to act as facilitators.'***
>
> SCA.TI.6.6

One teacher summarised the conflict between the curriculum and available resources:

> ***'This curriculum is a very good curriculum, the only problem is it has become a room-led curriculum. It depends on the size of rooms we have got and the number of rooms we've got.'***
>
> SCA.TI.6.10

Data from student interviews supported these views and noted the value of working in an atmosphere of trust and support with a small number of selected colleagues. However, some students found the actual size of the small groups problematic:

> ***'Initially we were all together in a great lecture hall. But even the twenty [current group size] is too big for this type of learning that we are supposed to be doing. I don't think it matches the course.'***
>
> SCA.SI.2.4

The teachers had a difficult balancing act to do between providing the security and attention to students that they need in order to reflect on practice issues, and achieving this in a context of increasing pressure on space and staff time. Many believed that this would be achieved at a one-to-one tutorial. However, these do not always work out as planned.

One-to-one tutorials

It was recognised within the documentation of both study centres that it was important for teachers to respond to students as individuals in order to meet their learning needs and encourage their development in linking theory with practice. In interview data both teachers and students commented on the potential value of the one-to-one tutorial system. Teachers said it was the place where they could check out learning needs, identify learning difficulties, verify the understanding of concepts, offer support, monitor learning journals, encourage reflection and development, relate theory to practice, challenge students in safety and enable integration:

'Tutorials are where learners could get support with personal problems though tutorials are not used as therapy.'

SCA.G2.FN

Interviewer: 'Do you ever take those sorts of issues out of the classroom into tutorials?'

'I would if they were my personal students. I do try and discuss with them what they think they need, and what I think they need. Usually they're the same and sometimes they're not, and I then gear work, their interblock work, to that, and then from the work, the feedback, and the help I give them.'

SCA.TI.2.6

'My own personal tutees, we do it [challenge] both one-to-one and [in] group tutorials.'

SCB.TI.10.10

'The personal tutor is the key person to pull it all together.'

SCA.TI.6.10

However, the organisational difficulties of putting this into practice within the current contextual constraints were clearly identified. Teachers were acting as personal tutors to large numbers of students and finding it impossible to respond to increasing demands:

'The work load we have has been very high and up until recently I have had twenty-five [personal] students.'

SCB.TI.10.20

Students' responses to the tutorial system are documented in section 2.7.

The use of reflective learning journals

In Study Centre A this activity was gradually being introduced into the Dip. HE curriculum along with the idea of learning contracts. In Study Centre B learning journals were an assessed part of the programme. The majority of teachers interviewed stated an interest in the use of learning journals. All teachers mentioned the inter-relationship between the reflective journal, group work and personal tutorials. There was so much data on the use of learning journals from both teachers and students that this is dealt with in a separate section (2.8).

Working with students in clinical practice

A large number of teachers voiced the opinion that the clinical link role is vital to the development of reflection in students. Some were able to give examples of how they felt this process could work:

'When you're on the ward you can integrate theory and practice . . . say, this patient's come in with chest pain, has got some angina, [you can] talk to them [students] if they don't understand what that is. But then look at, say, what he does for a living, and that would make him social class whatever, and talk about that. Then, perhaps, how does that affect his behaviour now, because look what happens in social class one or two or three, say. You know that there is a higher incidence of smoking in . . . go through it like that . . . I really think that's done by being there with them, in the clinical placement, where they can actually put theory into practice and understand the link.'

SCB.TI.4

Others could give examples of how it did work demonstrating the integration of giving one-to-one tutorials, working with students in clinical settings, and using learning journals to encourage reflection and change:

> ***'I had a good example yesterday. I worked with two students who were shy and in fact one of them had expressed concern in IPS [interpersonal skills] about working in an adult ward. So I worked with them yesterday and one of them asked to go on a home visit; and there was a home visit booked with a patient, so she went with the occupational therapist, and it turned out to be quite a shocking experience, even for the occupational therapist, because they found the house to be in such a really awful state and the patient himself was apparently quite embarrassed. So the student hadn't come across such poverty and she was quite upset about it and just wanted to cry. So that was a wonderful opportunity to talk about nursing, what is nursing and what we do as nurses, and the patient in hospital and when they are ready to go home, and the kind of homes they go to. And then link it to sociology and social policy, and we talked about poverty. But I asked her to go home and reflect on that and write it up in her journal. And I'm going to contact her personal tutor and inform her that I asked the student to do this so that it can be followed up. Because once we have finished I have no other way. The pointers were to reflect on how she felt when she entered the house and then work out some kind of strategy. What did she learn from the experience which she can put to further use in the future? . . . I asked her to write that down in her diary because she can come back to that. I think that one of the aims of the diary as I see it is that students can go back and reflect on that and ask themselves, "How am I different now?" Rather than being a one-off writing of the journal which you share with your personal tutor and that is the end of it. I think it is much more dynamic than that.'***
>
> SCB.TL.10.4

Several teachers expressed frustration with a perceived lack of time to perform adequately many of their tutorial functions. The impact of changes being experienced by teachers in centres of nurse education, with the announcement of regional policies and the amalgamation of colleges with higher education, is summed up by the following teacher:

> ***'I feel we have been working under a lot of pressure and that I haven't been able to provide what I feel I should provide for my students . . . It has been very very difficult . . . A lot of people are going to lose their jobs, so that isn't very encouraging. It can be difficult to keep morale high in these circumstances. I would have liked more time to go to the wards and work with my students. It's all been a bit ad hoc. We do it as we go along without reflecting back ourselves on what we are doing!'***
>
> SCB.TL.10.22

Linking theory and practice was seen as a vital role of the nurse teacher. It was achieved through encouraging the role of reflection, especially in small-group work, individual tutorials, working with students in clinical and community placements and writing journals. Although strategies in both centres were similar, styles of teaching were more diverse.

2.5 Styles of teaching reflection

All three researchers independently recorded classroom observations of sessions at which students reflected on their practical placement experiences. Comparisons between the talk that had taken place illustrated differences in two main dimensions: the depth to which a topic was pursued and the degree to which students' own feelings and values were involved. Thus the teacher would elicit a general overview which could either be personalised or depersonalised; or topics raised could be explored for meaning with examples elicited to a greater depth which might or might not relate directly to students' own feelings. This began to make sense of the rather loose models which some teachers had mentioned at the start of the research: the 'educational' and the 'counselling'. Different types of classroom control and levels of risk were implied.

Thus, a general model of teaching approaches began to emerge from the data. Teachers seemed to be working in four different teaching modes (see Figure 2) which involved a range of alternative behaviours. These modes of teaching may be linked to teachers' previous experience, such as a background in mental health or intensive care, or to interests such as biology, or to communication skills teaching whose primary aim is to encourage participants to reflect and develop. The interest via communication skills was founded on two types of theoretical approach: one aims to develop self-awareness (Rogers, 1961; Jourard, 1971), the other concentrates on developing interpersonal skills (Ellis and Whittington, 1981; Egan 1982). Within teaching sessions teachers could be seen to move from one of the four modes to another, which may or may not have been conscious and planned. 'Surface, impersonal' was commonly observed in classroom sessions defined by teachers as engaging students in reflection.

Surface, Impersonal Addresses practical and cognitive material and involves relatively superficial exploration.	**Deep, Impersonal** Has a deliberate focus on specific cognitive material, theoretical issues, themes and facts. Can involve deep exploration and includes challenge. Sometimes includes use of strategies which focus on others, e.g. video analysis of others' behaviour.
Surface, Personal Addresses affective areas and behaviours but blocks or diverts from deeper exploration.	**Deep, Personal** Focuses on both cognitive and affective areas and behaviours. Explores deeply. Uses strategies which focus on self, e.g. analysis of self on video. Challenges affective areas. Students share personal material.

Figure 2: The four teaching modes emerging from the data

The aspects that teachers needed to take into account when organising teaching were varied – the time available for the session, the topic focus, the number of students in the group, and so on – and required making a variety of complex judgements. These constraints influenced decisions related to whether the session was very open or more topic-focused; whether students were passive or active; whether the session was controlled by teacher or learners; and whether students felt safe and able to take risks.

The following are three examples of group sessions from both study centres. The first two, from Study Centre A, are of two sessions for students on their study days, designed to enable them to reflect on their practice placements on the CFP. The students were five months into their programme. Individual students had had a variety of experience in the preceding week; for example, in special schools, playgroups, working with a health visitor, on a ward and in an operating theatre. The extracts illustrate the different levels of reflection, different teacher styles and how small-group work was used.

Example 1

The first example was a session of three hours with several different activities: small groups, plenary discussion, video clips, paper and pencil exercise. The topic was the role of the family and the ways families function. There was one teacher and 19 Dip. HE students.

The session began with dividing the students into four small groups and asking them to write down key points on flip chart paper about what they had learned about the role of parents and the family. Their responses were at a very general level: socialising the children, playing with them, educating, encouraging, showing right from wrong. The teacher took these broad responses and, with the whole group, began a process of questioning to 'unpack' and explore what they meant by the words they had used, for example:

Teacher: *'How did you see them encouraging?'*

Students were asked to give examples. Then there was further unpacking and the following dialogue took place:

Teacher: *'What do you mean by supportive?'*

Student 1: *'Taking an interest in the child. [In the school] a report book goes to parents to write what they did at home. Parents are very involved in what they're doing'.*

Student 2 (student with paediatric ward experience):
'But parents can't always be there. Other people have an attitude to whether they are there or not.'

Teacher: *'So that influences what parents do?'*

Student 2: *'Parents get confused about at what level they are expected to be involved.'*

Teacher: *'Some things you'll come across time and time again. It depends on the individuals giving the care; people make specific judgements about parental behaviour.'*

Here the teacher was using the information to make a general point. She then goes back to getting the students to explain what they mean:

Teacher: *'What about this love and caring?'*

Student 3: *'If you've got love and care . . . well you function better with more love and care and get confidence.'*

Teacher: *'Some parents may well love their children but may have clear ideas about the conditions under which it is given – 'conditional love'. They use withdrawal of love as a means of control. Did you see that on placements?'*

A general point was made and the concept of 'conditional' love introduced.

Student 4: *'Yes . . . [goes on to give an example from her health-visiting placement]'.*

The teacher then looked for contrary examples:

Teacher: *'Did anyone see anything different?'*

This led into a discussion of how children learn and whether by example or by telling. One student began with the broad response that they learned through 'discipline, acquiring values and conditioning. Even if you have a bad value that's better than none at all.' The unpacking of meaning by the teacher, with examples, began again:

Teacher: *'What do you mean by a 'bad value'?*

Student 5: *'To me a bad value is a child of three saying an F word, whereas to someone else it isn't offensive at all.'*

Student 6: *'There are certain things children have to realise.'*

Teacher: *'From the placements you've seen, how do they get those values? What happens if parents are swearing?*

Student 5: *'They pass it on.'*

Student 1: *'In the special needs school . . . there's an awful lot of effing an blinding going on.'*

Teacher: *'Families are not the only institution children learn from – it's confusing for children. They need the opportunity to produce their own value system . . . consistency of messages. Families may give them different messages from school.'*

By this stage in the discussion the teacher has used the students' examples to illustrate that children may have conflicting sets of values to respond to.

Student 7: *'If you're too controlling you're not allowing it to develop its own sense of discipline and values.'*

Here a student made her own general point.

The session continued to get students to provide examples from their experience to explain the meaning of words they used. This was followed by the teacher making a general point and relating this to key conceptual pegs (e.g. 'conditional' and 'unconditional' love and its effects on family interaction). Students were then shown video extracts to illustrate parents' and their children's interactions, with discussion afterwards. Finally, a paper and pencil exercise, private to each student, asked them to write down who were the significant people close to them in their lives. This made the point that nurses should not assume that it was always only the parents or 'obvious' relatives whom patients needed to be with them.

The teacher had used four types of activity to help students report back and explore their experience. She had kept the discussion on task by making general and conceptual points and then eliciting further examples rather than go into any one experience in depth. This surface level approach seemed entirely appropriate for students at an early stage of the programme. The questions which asked the students to explain the words they used through example were teaching them how to make overt the observations they had used to come to their judgements, i.e. to show the basis of their evidence, and also to look for contravening evidence: 'did anyone see anything different?'

In the second example, with a different teacher but with the same students a week later, the students were given more responsibility for sharing their reflection by working in small groups and reporting back to the main group. The title for this session was 'The Caring Organisation'.

The teacher began by asking the students to break into small groups of four or five people. Their task was to discuss examples of positive and negative incidents which had occurred in their recent practice placements, allowing enough time for each person in the small group to contribute. They were then to select an example to feed back to the whole group.

The discussion in the small group attended by the observer began with the students discussing how they had been perceived in their placements. It started with a positive experience:

'. . . in the operating theatre there was a major operation. The surgeon did say what he was doing, he didn't ignore me. It was a morale booster.'

Another student, whose experience had been in a school, immediately gave a different view:

'. . . the staff head and deputy didn't know why I was there, "What is this nurse doing here?"'

She went on to describe her negative incident with a child where she perceived a similar unwillingness on the part of the school to take on board a social problem which, like having a nurse, seemed to be outside its narrow definition of 'education'. The first student pointed out that they were:

'. . . all working towards the health of the child – we've all got the same aim, it's weird that they can't include you at the end of the day.'

A third student added:

'There's a lack of understanding of what we're there for – a set of prejudices.'

Another student said that it was easy to get side-tracked into seeing education as training only, instead of looking at the whole development of the child. She asked:

'How would we feel if a student teacher was in the hospital?'

They felt that this would be accepted as in the hospital play was viewed as positive and there was a holistic view of the development of the child on the ward.

Another student said that she had more positive than negative experiences in her two weeks in a children's hospital. The most positive thing that had leapt out at her was that:

'After two weeks I said "yes, this is what I want to do".'

Her one negative experience was embedded in a positive overview:

'. . . when I didn't get down to the operating theatre. When you get back to the school [of nursing] you think "I've done that" – you are more aware of what you can do.'

Other students added:

'Yes, with the placements, it's what we can get out of it.'

'Yes, you're not just there to be a nurse but a person in that class looking at how children learn.'

But another student pointed out that the children still saw her as a nurse:

'Kids come up to me – "you're a nurse, I've got something in my eye".'

The nurse role was also there in the student herself, as another member of the group, who had been in a school, explained:

'There was a child with a nose bleed. The auxiliary helper put her head back, and I said, "Excuse me, you shouldn't do that". I explained why – blocking the airways . . . blood goes into the lungs. I kept apologising.'

She had felt awkward about correcting the auxiliary. But another student commented:

'I think that's positive – you were assertive.'

The discussion had begun with the importance of feeling accepted in the placement. This developed into thinking about how a nurse student was perceived by the different people in the placement and by the student herself. The topic of role and perceived expertise was returned to later in the discussion.

A student in the group who had been on a placement with a health visitor described herself as feeling 'a hundred times more confident' after learning about the last few weeks of pregnancy when she had had such doubts about maternity work. She added however that:

'It's made me much more cautious – to really think before you speak. Now I'm very aware of my lack of medical knowledge. Now I say, "I'm purely an observer, I've no authority; if you want to check this go and talk to the health visitor". Make sure you cover yourself. My tact level has improved!'

Being a constant 'newcomer' to the different settings raised its own problems:

'It's so hard to go into another school. When I go into my next school I will meet my fourth teacher.'

'What did they call you, first names or . . . ?'

'Teachers prefer first names.'

'No, some teachers prefer surnames.'

'You're playing two roles.'

'I've been in so many businesses – some formal and some informal. It's better to assume formal terms are correct.'

'First name terms out of class, not in class.'

After this exchange, the following discussion took place between three students. A student, who had her own children and had worked in a nursery before becoming a student, commented on her experience in a special school:

'I've worked with children all my life so I still find it incredible that I could be so shocked and naive as I am by a thirteen-year-old boy who looks perfectly normal and can't read a word.'

'Yes, when you think of special needs you think of obvious things.'

'I've always thought I was quite aware. He was so vulnerable too. Some of them seemed so worldly, a lot had been abroad. They have communication problems . . . I wanted to improve my observation skills.'

'You've changed. You're a lot more outgoing.'

'But the friends I made in the first thirteen weeks – none of them are here. You're bonded so close and then disappear [to different placements].'

The group then rounded off the discussion with one proffering the general advice about placements to the others that:

'If you can say, "Hang on, it's them not me", then you can get back on target.'

The group then returned to a plenary session led by the teacher. Theirs was the first group to be called upon to feed back a positive or negative incident. Prefacing her story by saying that she had not felt very welcome in the school, the student told about the child with a social problem which the school had not seen as being part of their remit in 'education'. The teacher responded by asking simply for questions from the whole group. As further details were asked for by other students it emerged that the head of the school had not allowed the student to give a health education session which had been approved by the class teacher. Nor did the teacher she had been assigned to seem welcoming:

'He would not let me go with him and follow him round. He told me he expected me to be younger. I think I made him feel embarrassed.'

A student asked:

'Do you think it was lack of effort or deep prejudice? Student teachers are also struggling in this school. I've not yet come across a school like this.'

Three others joined the discussion:

'Do they get paid for having us?'

'No.'

'But some are pleased to have us as an extra pair of hands.'

The teacher responded with an explanatory comment:

'Organisations taking on students of nursing for the first time don't know what they are letting themselves in for. People have preconceptions. Age, status, ethnic background, professional status all affect them.'

Here the teacher was relating the example to the theme of the session, 'The Caring Organisation', and making a wider point about people's perceptions.

After a coffee break, a student from another small group discussed the play-link scheme she had experienced which went into family homes and involved parents in play activities with their children.

'It seemed to really help, to really work. Nursery nurses worked with parents on parent craft. If the social worker or health visitor were worried they sort of ordered them in. I thought it a really good idea.'

Without any prompting from the teacher, other students began asking questions: What did the parents think about it? Did some parents feel that once involved they were on a hit list? Was she surprised to find out that some parents couldn't play with their children? How was the subject broached by the health visitor? Whether the scheme was advertised and was it funded through social services? At this point the teacher clarified the extent of the local schemes and the role of social services. He also pointed out that it had been shown that scores on the Maudsley parenting skills repertoire had increased after such training. However, when a student asked 'What do they learn?' He replied 'I didn't want to go into it – just to note that.' This moved the group on to enable a member of one of the other small groups to report her experience:

'I had a bad experience on 'A' Ward. They were too preoccupied with themselves, not interested in me, didn't want to know. They were not very organised there; they don't fully understand what we're all about. And the RGNs were always digging.'

Another student commented in surprise:

'Really? I was on 'B' Ward [same hospital] and they were really interested and came up to me and asked about this programme. They said, "new faces, new places every two weeks – we wouldn't like to do that".'

'Do you think it's fear at the root?' [asked another student]

'It wasn't the students it was the older nurses.'

'But I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to be doing there really. We did ask and the door was shut in our face.'

At this point the teacher asked:

'So if you were a parent or a child in that organisation, would it be different? What is different?'

'They don't understand why we're not like the old students, why we're not in uniforms.'

Then two other students came in with contrary views:

'In 'C' Ward they were nice, non-judgmental, not taking it out on students.'

'They were very nice to me on 'A'. I played with the children. I said to staff that I felt guilty, playing. But she said "you have been a god-send, let me tell you . . . how important it is keeping them occupied . . . meeting their emotional and social needs and letting the nurses get on with meeting the physical needs which has to be done".'

There then followed a dialogue between the two students who seemed to have had quite different experiences on the same ward.

The session continued with further emphasis on the theme of organisations by asking small groups to look at how the organisation had worked in their particular recent practice placement (e.g. in the operating theatre). The teacher then drew out general points about organisations at the end of the session. The students' small-group work illustrated feedback and support being gained from each other without a teacher being present. The instruction to consider positive as well as negative experiences was valuable in making sure the discussion was not all about problems. In the plenary session, the students appeared to have increased their ability to question others about circumstances and evidence. This was facilitated by the teacher making clear that it was up to them to do this. The dialogue was less teacher-led than in the previous example, but he still retained control over when to move on.

The session gave the students the opportunity to discuss their uncertainties about their role as Dip. HE students and people's attitudes towards them. It emerged, too, that students could have quite different perceptions of the same ward. It would have been interesting to explore why this was. For instance, did the student who felt she had a negative experience wait to be told what to do and then felt ignored, while the other student simply elected to go ahead and play with the children? Such exploration is probably not feasible in a group of 19, discussion is kept at surface level. Again this appears to be in keeping with the early stage of the group in their programme as well as the size.

In this session at Study Centre B, there were 13 students who were at the end of the CFP and about to move into the adult branch; they were therefore further on in the programme than the students in Examples 1 and 2. The purpose of the session was to focus on their feedback from their practice placements on the use of interpersonal (IP) skills in their work.

The teacher began the session asking students to consider three questions:

- how have you developed?
- how have you grown?
- how have you been able to apply IP skills?

She then threw the discussion open for student contributions.

Student 1: *'I used IP skills mostly during mental health. I became aware that I was using paraphrasing. I used to go home and think over what I'd been doing and think how it could be improved. I recognised I had the confidence to approach a withdrawn patient. I couldn't have done that a year ago.'*

Student 2: *'I used my IP skills mostly in General, with clients grieving. One patient had lost his wife and another had a leg amputated. Different things but they were both grieving. I used IP skills a lot there. It was only the students who had the time to talk to clients, trained staff don't. They are too busy rushing around just getting the jobs done. They don't have time to reflect.'*

Student 3: *'I was involved in a counselling session with a trained member of staff. I was encouraged to take part so I tried out some skills and they worked. The client came back to me and sought me out to talk some more. I was really pleased.'*

Student 2: *'Being supernumerary makes it possible. The rostered staff have so much to do, I feel very sorry for them. Sometimes they run around like headless chickens and go off exhausted.'*

Teacher: *'What will happen when you're qualified?'*

Student 4: *'When we're qualified we'll have to find a balance.'*

One student then told the following story:

Student 5: *'When I was working in mental health there was a big staff meeting, 'X' and I were left on the ward. We were in the office trying to get to grips with who all the clients were, and one man came into the office and asked if he could speak to me. I said yes and that I would be out in a minute. I went out and said I was free and he could talk to me now. He looked at my name badge and read 'student' and said he didn't want to talk to an xxxxing student. I was sitting in a chair and he got up, grabbed a chair and lunged towards me. I thought he was really going to hit me and I was very scared, I just sat very still, when he was just an inch or two away he just slammed the chair down on the ground and swore, then my colleague came out of the office to see what was going on and then I could get up. I don't know if*

I used IP skills, because he got so cross, but at least he didn't attack me.'

Teacher: *'What skills do you all think 'X' used?'*

Students: *'You must have used good non-verbal skills.'*

'You stayed quiet – active use of silence – you listened.'

'You didn't get angry and inflame the situation.'

'You didn't retaliate, you demonstrated acceptance and positive regard, you showed trust.'

'I think you were brilliant, I would have been terrified.'

Student 5: *'I was.'*

Teacher: *'I am concerned you were left alone on the ward so soon. Did you report this to a member of staff?'*

Student 5: *'Yes I spoke to my mentor. The staff apologised. It was all OK.'*

Student 6: *'Staff get used to some clients, then they label them. This happened where I was, I used 'immediacy' [giving feedback about one's feelings straightaway] to say how it made me feel when a client was labelled in a negative way. I confronted it. I think you have to make judgements about whether what you are seeing is fair and if not deal with it. You can't just stay quiet. You have to be the patients' advocate.'*

Student 7 offered examples of her experience in paediatrics. She had negative experiences on a very quiet and unstimulating ward where staff were happy to do their knitting and read.

Student 8, who had been on the same ward, had been sent to another ward when hers was quiet, at her own request. Student 7 had not asked.

Student 9 offered her positive experience of a nursery ward, commenting that paediatrics was not all bad, and that they didn't want to give the wrong impression.

By this time the class was involved in a lively discussion which identified and explored the following issues:

- idealism vs realism
- numerous ethical issues, e.g. respect for individuals
- patients' rights, patient's charter, nurses' rights
- autonomy, nurses' responsibilities, being non-judgmental
- dilemmas
- 'not for resuscitation' orders: who decides, how decisions are made, and whether clients and relatives are involved.

Early in the session, the teacher intervened on several occasions to state what should or ought to be done, also to encourage and support students. At one point she said she hoped students were writing their experiences in their journals. There was a general groan and some students made faces at each other, giving the impression that they were not. The teacher encouraged them to use their journals and to take difficult issues to their personal tutors.

The difference between the students in this group at the end of the CFP and those at the five-month point, was that they were able to reflect on how they had used skills learned in the college setting; they could talk about some of the concepts (e.g. labelling patients, patients' advocacy); they had some confidence in speaking to staff and mentors about their views; finally, they related their experience to a wider discussion on realism, on nurses' and patients' rights and on an ethical dilemma. The discussion was somewhat more focused on personal incidents and feedback. The students, in interviews, commented on the value of such sessions:

> ***'Problems are shared, we feel we are not alone.'***
>
> ***'. . . give us something to compare with, check experience and understandings against.'***
>
> ***'. . . give us an opportunity to learn from each other.'***
>
> SCB.SL6.FN

None of the classroom sessions which the observers attended pursued ideas or concepts to great depth or complexity. Nor did they explore individual feelings at more than a controlled surface level. This may be seen as entirely appropriate to the CFP stage and reassuring to those teachers concerned that large groups are not suited to in-depth exploration of students' feelings. Alternatively, the observers may simply have not been present at sessions when deeper exploration took place. But against this, teachers reported that deeper exploration and insight with students was most likely to occur on a one-to-one basis.

Teachers who had facilitated reflection with final-year students and on post-registration programmes described more stages that they expected students to go through in reflecting on an incident in the clinical area than we had seen on the CFP. They reported four chronological steps which were to get the students to:

- describe a situation: 'go over the incident'; 'what was being said?'; 'how did you feel?'; 'what did you see?' – the 'how and why' questions
- analyse it
- say how it might have been differently handled
- take ownership of what they could have done and would do in the future; the students learn to stand back from the situation and the analysis gives confidence to act positively rather than avoiding such situations in future.

The starting point for discussion could be 'What have you been doing? What has come up?' Coping with relatives and people dying were typical topics students brought up. The sessions were not meant to deal with students' personal problems, they were not therapy sessions; it was up to the students to dictate the pace and how deep they went. Negative views could be turned around into positive ones to show that it was a redeemable situation and how they could contribute, enabling the student to take control.

The importance of 'not going in too deep' and having 'safety nets' were stressed. For child abuse sessions, for example, a list of telephone helpline numbers was given which could be used by clients, but it was made clear that these lines were also there for the nurse student. Teachers timetabled those sessions which could be emotionally difficult for students early in the day so that there was time afterwards for individuals to seek further help if needed.

One of the purposes of reflection emphasised by teachers was to enable students to recognise their existing skills and knowledge and to see that these were transferable. Some Enrolled Nurse conversion students, for example, felt that they had no skills or knowledge at

the start of the course, even though they might complain that they had been left to run the ward in the past. Students starting year three could be 'petrified'; showing students how to link one area of their experience in year two to the next through developing common concepts could be done in reflection sessions.

At the CFP stage we observed steps one and two: description and analysis, with the complexity of analysis increasing for students at the end of the programme. There were also some examples of students having the confidence to say how they felt about an incident to ward staff.

2.6 Students' approaches to learning in the college context

General reactions to the programmes

Students' reactions and their ability to make sense of and organise their learning were affected by the difference between their prior expectations of the balance between theory and practice, the actual amount of study, their perception of the relevance of the teaching, the assessment profile and their perception of the efficiency of the organisation of the programme.

They seemed more able to make sense of the programme input when they had clinical and community experiences against which to test the theory. The amount and type of this experience varied between the two study centres, but students commented on the theory–practice balance, indicating a preference for some practical experience:

> ***'I expected it to be more theory. I'm happy that it's not, but I didn't expect there to be so much practice in the first eighteen months.'***
>
> SCA.SI.2.4

> ***'Even though I knew there would be more theory, I expected there to be more practical in the first year. I feel pretty disappointed.'***
>
> SCB.SI.7

Their comments reflected actual differences in the amount of time spent on practical experience in Centres A and B. Centre A had eleven weeks of practice time in two-week blocks. In Centre B there were day visits (see section 1.4).

In the early days of the programme some students found the workload heavy; this influenced their ability to make sense of what they were learning:

> ***'We were shattered in the first two weeks. Basically, to start with, we weren't doing any practical work, there was a lot more thinking. This was hard.'***
>
> SCA.SI.1.2

> ***'It sometimes seems a very heavy day.'***
>
> SCB.SI.5

Their perception of the relevance of the academic work also influenced their ability to organise the work in their minds. They sought assurances of relevance from the teaching staff:

> ***'Teachers kept saying it will [become relevant] . . . "it's only an introduction; don't worry if it doesn't fit in".'***
>
> ***'Got fed up, couldn't put it anywhere [in my mind].'***
>
> ***'Introductory term – no relevance.'***

'Seems relevant [preparation for community experience].'

SCA.CO.4

They also felt constrained in the learning process due to their perceptions of a strong emphasis on assessment:

'There's never a period when I'm free from worry over exams. As soon as one is over the next is around the corner. The assessment level is too high.'

SCB.SI.4

Some found the new environment and changes in lecturer confusing:

'It was very muddled, things kept changing, either the room or the lecture, or the lecturers. We were learning to cope with confusion.'

SCA.SI.1.2

This learning to cope with confusion and uncertainty seemed to be a key factor in settling into the programme and study.

Settling into study

All students had previously developed ideas on how to study:

'If I read what I want to learn, write it down, then think about it, think about what I've read, I find it stays with me an awful lot easier than just taking it down. While I'm writing I'm not concentrating on the content and the meaning; if I read it, put it down, think about it, then I remember, it's much easier.'

SCB.SI.1

and some could identify the source of these strategies:

'I think I use what I was used to at high school.'

SCB.SI.1

Some students felt they had learned new strategies informally from friends in general discussions:

'I always used to leave everything to the last minute; I've learnt to start a couple of months before.'

SCB.SI.7

In deciding what to study, because some students felt the programmes were very test-orientated, their approach was very practical and resulted in decisions on focus being directly related to the next test. The same approach has been identified in students attending medical college (Becker *et al.* 1961) and among law students (Miller and Parlett, 1974).

'You seem to go from test, to test, to test, to test, to test, to test.'

SCB.SI.7

Students saw the most challenging test as one which tests the integration of theories, and theory with practice. There was considerable anxiety about these tests:

Student 1: *'The scenario is to test the integration of all the 'ologies: you might get psychology and sociology in one scenario, or nursing and biology.'*

Student 2: *'You've got to remember the theory to be able to apply it.'*

SCB.SI.7

There was concern on the part of students to be able to demonstrate understanding of the numerous theories they were being introduced to and to be able to link these with knowledge related to nursing care. This was the key area that reflection processes addressed.

2.7 How students make sense of linking theory with practice

In both study centres there was an expectation that students would be supervised in practice placements by preceptors who had been prepared to guide their learning. There was also an expectation that teachers would spend one day a week in clinical settings working with and supporting students (SCA and SCB FN).

The concerns of students were:

- getting accepted on the ward
- understanding their role
- having sufficient knowledge and skills.

These concerns are not new for nurse students beginning clinical work, but the change to supernumerary status and the Dip. HE curriculum posed new expectations and reactions. This is part of the context in which students are trying to develop their links between theory and practice.

Integration into the ward culture

Data from student interviews suggested that they found themselves struggling with learning the rules, identifying ward protocol and feeling accepted. They felt guilty at feeling unprepared for clinical work. Some were concerned about wearing their own clothes in clinical settings (at Study Centre A, students did not wear uniform), and either worried about not working the same shifts as ward staff (SCA) or adjusted their hours to 'fit in' (SCB).

> ***'What do I call Sister? In my ward staff use first names, but do I use Sister's first name ?'***
>
> SCB.SI.3.1

> ***'No one knows what to expect of us.'***
>
> ***'We're not allowed to do anything; or don't know how to do anything.'***
>
> ***'I felt I was not part of the team.'***
>
> ***'It would be nice to know what we are doing.'***
>
> SCA.SI.1.5

> ***'There's that feeling that people aren't quite sure who you are and why you are there. We weren't recognised as being part of the nursing team and not being on shifts didn't help.'***
>
> ***'They would say "I can't give you that because it's a dirty job", and you would be feeling you really wanted to do it.'***
>
> SCA.SI.2.6

> ***'To "fit in" and get on well on the ward, you've got to work with your mentor. You have to work shifts. Although we are supposed to do thirty hours a week, if you leave early or haven't worked a "proper" shift, they look on you as though you're not pulling your weight.'***
>
> SCA.SI.7

These interview comments raise the same points discussed in the reflection group on study days.

Students also gave examples of when they felt only part of the clinical team:

> ***'I felt I got a better reception from GPs. They really involved you and gave you lots of information. Not just GPs, but the surgeons, the anaesthetists, they just would give you so much compared to nurses who didn't give you very much at all.'***
>
> SCA SL2.6

In spite of planned preceptorship to encourage the learning process, students were experiencing difficulty in settling in, which hampered their learning:

> ***'We've been on our wards a week and today we found out who our mentor is going to be.'***
>
> ***'And I don't know yet.'***
>
> ***'All my mentors, I've had to tell them what to write [in the student's practical experience record].'***
>
> SCB SI

In clinical areas, the effectiveness of the mentorship or preceptorship role in relation to the Dip. HE students was diminished due to stresses imposed by heavy demands on a decreasing number of people available to fulfil this function. A teacher who saw her role as including a clinical support element said:

> ***'I believe there is a problem there. Because although everyone is meant to have a liaison teacher, and within our contract we are supposed to go to the ward once a week – that is one whole day – in practice it does not happen. I visit ward after ward after ward where the students say you are the only person they see, and this happens week after week.'***
>
> SCB TL10.14

The link role is also important in the development of trained staff to undertake their responsibilities as mentors and preceptors to Dip. HE students.

> ***'The people out there monitoring them . . . I ask myself are they very skilled at reflection? Do they know what reflection is? Are they doing it themselves so that they can encourage the students to do the same?'***
>
> SCB TL10.14

The Jowett, Walton and Payne (1994) report on the Dip. HE points out the problematic nature of the responsibility for links between education and service. In summarising their results they said that:

> *'In the event, most of the practice teaching was left to staff in the service areas, although the time for such teaching was much reduced in hospital areas, where placements were short and supervisory staff nurses, as well as sisters/charge nurses, assumed increasing managerial responsibilities.'*
>
> *Jowett et al., 1994, 'Summary', pp. 3–4*

Problems with students feeling sufficiently skilled in the clinical areas were consistently reported, even in those areas where the Dip. HE had been running for several intakes and staff might have got used to the new type of student:

'Yesterday the doctor said to me can I put a saline drip up and I just didn't know what to do, and she looked at me as if to say "My god you're thick". I felt so stupid, especially as they know you're in your second year.'

'The staff nurse left me to do a drug calculation, and I worked it out the way I thought I could and she said that's not right and I thought I'd got the right answer so I went back to her with the same answer several times and she said "No". So I went to one of the lecturers who was on the ward and said I'm sure this calculation is right and the lecturer said to me that's not the right equation. So I said "What other equation is there for this calculation, I've only learnt one so I've used that". Now it's not my fault I didn't know and we've been having numeracy support sessions and they both said to me I should have known, but how could I know if I hadn't been taught? I felt so stupid and I was really angry at the end of it.'

'When you come out here for practical experience after a year in college and you're supposed to have all these practical skills, we don't have a lot of confidence because we don't have enough experience as we should in really basic areas. It's easier in mental health and learning disabilities where you don't need so much practical skill.'

SCB.SI.7

The value of tutorials

Some, but not all, students found tutorials valuable in helping them link theory with practice.

'My personal tutor is very approachable and has become like a friend. I was able to take issues from my journal to the tutorial, which has helped. The process has helped me learn a lot. Feedback I've been given has helped me gain in confidence and helped me feel good about my progress.'

SCB.SI

Others found the tutorial system did not work for them. Students varied in whether they felt able to take things to personal tutors, whom some saw as authority figures. Many expressed concerns about lack of time, worrying the teachers:

'I don't think I could take it [thoughts and feelings about critical issues] to a tutor. I suppose they haven't got time to listen.'

'I think they work very well for me. I like my personal tutor and she's had some really difficult times and she's really helped me through.'

'I can't talk to her personally, it's to do with me and people in authority. At school I was always one to hide from teachers.'

'Quite a few lecturers are doing their own study, or they've got a lot of students, or they're not in the college; it's always after college and we don't feel like staying after college.'

SCB.SI.7

As tutorials were not observed it was not possible to do more than document what teachers and students said occurred. What stages they went through and how they progressed was difficult to ascertain.

2.8 Learning journals

In Study Centre B there was a page dedicated to the learning journal/diary in the curriculum document related to assessments. This stated that:

> *'Keeping a reflective Journal/Diary is a requirement of the programme and regarded as formative. It is not optional, but is confidential. As part of the student's self-development and reflective learning, the student may choose to discuss the Journal content with the personal Tutor, but this must be the student's choice.'*
>
> *SCB curriculum document*

In Study Centre A there was less emphasis on the learning journal in the early stages of the programme, but an intention to encourage more reflective writing in the second and subsequent units.

The teachers had clear ideas about how the system could or should work. They introduced students to the idea of recording events, gave them some guidelines and encouraged them to share selected parts of their journal material either in small-group work or during tutorials:

> ***'We ask students at the end of the day to think back over the day and pick out the things which they've enjoyed and why they've enjoyed it. Pick out the things that didn't go as well as they hoped it would go and what may have influenced – even if they don't directly understand what may have caused it – not to go as well, so you think about their feelings. For example, we have just had a group of students on their first day out in the ward environment this week and many of them I am sure were very frightened and very insecure about going into the ward environment and probably some of the things that would have come up in that would be not knowing what was expected of them, not knowing what to do. In three months' time at the end of the unit we'll ask them to look back to their feelings at the beginning of the unit to see how they've grown and developed as a result of the experience that's been given to them.'***
>
> SCB TE13

Students, however, found the process of writing a journal difficult, particularly in the early stages of the programme:

> ***'I find it extremely difficult to keep a journal. I hate writing about myself and when I read it again, I think that's not really how I felt.'***
>
> ***'I start out with good intentions, but especially while we are in college, it reads more like a diary of what we've done, not a reflection. I find it hard to write it all down.'***
>
> ***'I haven't done mine for ages, and I've moved recently and I wouldn't know where it was. When I did do it I didn't write anything personal in it. I'm not going to write something personal down in a book that no one is going to read, that doesn't do me any benefit, and what I want to talk about, I talk about it with my friends. It's just another thing to do. It's another piece of paperwork, another extra thing when you could be doing something else.'***
> ***(This student sounded quite angry.)***

'I've spoken to a lot of people in different colleges, it's the same opinion there. It's just a waste of time. If you know you've got to hand it in, you back-date it. It won't be truthful, you won't say what you really felt at the time. So it's not just us.'

Some students thought verbal feedback more appealing:

'Feedback is more effective than writing. If we had feedback once a week or something we could get everything off our chests.'

'You get to write down in your journal, but you don't express yourself as much as you would talking. Some people can't express themselves on paper . . . and little things get dealt with before they become big things.'

Students were uncertain what to put into the journal. After the first six months of training some students used it as a timetable of what was done. Others said:

'I haven't found much to put into it yet.'

SCB.SL3

'Basically it's to write down what you've liked and what you haven't liked and that's it.'

SCB.SL2

'I always leave them until the last minute. Write them up the night before I think it will be needed.'

'My personal tutor doesn't look at it. I can select and use if necessary. I don't often do it.'

SCB.SL6.FN

'Mine doesn't either, but asks me what I've done. I make it up.'

'They're not easy to keep up, when I'm tired I can't be bothered, I'm too damn lazy.'

'When you're tired it's hard to remember, there's too much to do. Can't do everything all the time. It's a low priority, and I prefer to concentrate on other things like passing the tests.'

'I began enthusiastically, became less frequent, more discriminating, as time went by I did it less often but more likely to share really important things with my personal tutor.'

'There needs to be more clinical linking so we can share difficulties at the time.'

'It helps if you begin early, gets you into the habit.'

'Also helps with focus on cardex and care plans.'

SCB.SL6.FN

The majority of teachers demonstrated considerable awareness and understanding of the potential difficulties when using journals. Many felt that, although students could be offered help to reflect, not all could make use of that help. They voiced concerns that some students might never be able to use the reflective process appropriately:

'Many learners find maintaining the reflective journal very difficult . . . a) lack of experience b) they initially don't see the relevance of it and it isn't until you get to a couple of months and can start looking

back and seeing how you develop and how things change that they can appreciate the value of what we're trying to do. So I think the hardest thing from our point of view is actually getting them to keep it and encouraging them to keep it. We tend to find that if they've kept it for the first six months they keep doing it. They usually start off being very very good, they do it for the first week every day, then it sort of slips to every other day, then once a week and then once a fortnight, then once a month, and then it sort of doesn't happen for months and months and months. All I ask is that when I go through them, and I discuss it with the students, and if they choose not to bring the journal to me, is to remind them that they can be asked by the external examiner to produce extracts from it, as part of the assessment strategy, and to sort of encourage them to say OK you've got a gap in it, think back about what you've got over the last x number of weeks and then try and build on it from there. So just because you haven't done it from the start, that isn't the end of it – they haven't lost hope, they've still got a chance to work on it . . . With a bit of encouragement they can usually get into it.'

SCB.TL1.6

One group of teachers were able to identify blocks to reflective learning which they perceived to be related to students' long-standing personal problems, for example:

'I think the most common problem is that people tend to be quite descriptive . . . Other problems are people don't understand why it is important to reflect on what they are doing . . . Then we move on to people who feel angry, carry around anger with them, people who have personal problems, at home, all sorts, marital problems, troublesome childhood; recently we found a student had been abused as a child. Quite serious problems of that nature. They are a small minority that we know of. It is difficult to tell because recent research is saying that about three quarters of children are abused in some form or other. Starting with verbal abuse and on to more serious abuse. One has to be very careful about that obviously. It is difficult to tell what kind of things we are looking at and then there is one or two who have . . . mental problems . . . mental illness. But again that is a small minority. But then there are a good number of people who do it very well. Who are well adjusted mentally and psychologically and are developing their reflection very well I think.'

SCB.TL10.18

Teachers in both centres felt that students' difficulties and blocks were better understood when teachers themselves had personally experienced the process, by being asked formally to use reflection through the use of reflective journals and through linking this with a tutorial system:

'Like a lot of processes, unless you actually do it you would have very little understanding of the in-depth issues involved.'

SCA.TL4.1

'When I kept a reflective journal some of the things I found out I didn't really want to know at that time, so it can be quite dangerous in that way . . . We are expecting a lot of them.'

SCB.TL4.2

As a result of this understanding, teachers identified the need for developing specific skills, for students to have support while undertaking this activity, and for teachers to have clear guidelines for referral to other sources of expertise.

Some teachers had undertaken counselling courses to diploma level and felt they had the skills to undertake this role, but were unsure of the appropriateness of this and had insufficient time to see it through. There were also dilemmas related to issues of confidentiality. There was real concern about insufficiently qualified teachers not being able to deal with a reflective session which got into deep personal issues. Experienced teachers dealt with this with safety net procedures, controlling discussion and referral.

> ***'It has been very difficult to set the boundaries between being a personal tutor and being a counsellor and we have identified that a lot of our personal students, and it is not a minority, a lot of our students need counselling, and we believe that we cannot do it, or we don't want to do it, we have not got the time. We are not here in the role of counsellors. So it then becomes very difficult to know where to draw the line between being a personal tutor and being a counsellor.'***
>
> SCB.TL.10.12

> ***'I see the whole thing on a continuum really. I think the depth of reflection and how much you can help students reflect and delve into their past and their present experiences and help them on, is on a continuum from education to therapy. I'm not sure how much I want to move along the continuum; I mean I know I haven't got many counselling skills, and I don't particularly want to have those . . . I would like to move it so that educationally it's the best you can get, because I really do believe you have to learn by thinking, by reflecting, and then moving it on, so that they learn from that. I would like some sort of product to come out of this process.'***

> ***'I do refer students to the agencies I think are appropriate, and it's not just that it's the practical things, I don't want to spend hours of my time sorting out their finances and their flat and goodness knows what. I don't see that as my role, so if there was somewhere they could go for sort of social work, welfare advice and counselling, it should be somebody that's not part of the teaching group.'***
>
> SCA.TL.2.7/8

When a teacher did enable a student to move towards reflecting on her own approach there was a mutual feeling of satisfaction and growth. In the following example there is evidence of the student moving along a number of the dimensions teachers had planned:

> ***'A very good example I have had recently is a student using the learning journal for reflection . . . I use the sessions very much initially for values clarification. This student had very particular views because of her upbringing and religion about abortion, and we started off initially with her saying [that] on no account, no way, could she agree with abortion and it wasn't worth discussing; she was very, very angry that we were discussing it. In the discussion we said it was all right for her to have that view, but that for the professional context, although it's an area where nurses can exercise a conscientious objection to the procedure of abortion, they have a duty to care for the patient. We***

talked about that and how difficult it is when you have a personal value that conflicts with the professional view. What was very interesting was that this nurse had put it into a reflective journal. Initially it was a description . . . it started off as a group activity that became a more individual activity through an individual tutorial – it was pointed out to her that yes it's OK to have a description, but how would she reflect on that situation and what has she learnt from it. And [I] more or less helped her to write in a more reflective way, because she was telling me how she felt about it, about her anger . . . From that initial discussion on abortion and the value of the person, [she] moved to a different position, she was then questioning her own values in the light of the discussion and some disclosure by some of the students about friends or relatives, etc. And then the student went to the learning disability area and wrote in her journal that she was having second thoughts about her views on personhood and could really appreciate the difficulty a mother would face if she could not cope with a child who was mentally handicapped. So with that kind of exposure to that kind of experience it had some influence on her own thinking . . . In her journal she said she had really moved from this position of not really tolerating any other viewpoint to being more open to look at the circumstances, although she still had her own view. But at least she was able to think of the other person and to me that is a very good way of using reflection.'

SCB.TL3

Monitoring journals

Journals were monitored in three different ways by different teachers:

- those who never read students' journals but encouraged them to share selected extracts verbally
- those who read the pages learners elected to share with them
- those who read everything.

Teachers said that they made it clear to learners that their journals could be called in by Board examiners at any time.

The problem with not looking at students' journals was that journals could not then be used as teaching aids. It also signalled to some students that, in spite of exhortations about the need to do the writing, they could 'selectively neglect' this part of their workload as no one would be following it up. Opportunities were being lost to help students to improve the recording of their experiences so that they could move on from the descriptive or 'timetable of events' stage. The common reason given by teachers for not going through journals with students was they that were 'personal'. However, at the early stages at least, the large majority of students interviewed were writing descriptive, brief catalogues of events with minimal personal material and with not much motivation. The following comments in a group interview are illustrative:

Interviewer: 'Is anything done with the information after you've written it?'

Students: *'Not a lot, unless we want them [teachers] to see it.'*

'The important thing is to remain in constant communication with your tutor, that's the important thing.'

'You need a better tutorial system.'

'We need a system.'

'It's very very difficult to get time with your personal tutor.'

'They've got so much to do.'

'Sometimes when you do have problems you just can't find your personal tutor.'

'There aren't enough tutors.'

'And they get double-booked.'

'Then you just get three minutes and it's "You OK, OK, all right, next".'

Interviewer: 'Do you get the opportunity to discuss it [the journal] with your tutor?'

Students: *'I think you can sometimes, it depends on luck, luck that the tutor happens to be there, that they've got ten minutes, that you've got ten minutes, but it's not enough.'*

'Sometimes you've got something really important to tell them but they've only got two minutes and you feel . . . you can't blame them, though, they've got so many things to do.'

'The point about a learning journal is it's a method of reflection, it's not the only one. So I don't see the point of having to do a journal.'

Interviewer: 'Is there anyone in this group who uses a journal and finds it helpful ?'

Students: *'Not really. No.'*

Interviewer: 'So there's [counts] fifteen people who don't use a journal?'

Students: *[students confirm]*

'Or you fix it so you write what they want to hear.'

SCB.SI.2

It was clear from evidence from the student interviews that the reflective learning journals had little meaning for students until they had some clinical experience to reflect on, but also that they would benefit from closer scrutiny of their journals from teachers, not to 'make sure they do it', but to give positive help and encouragement early on. Some teachers were doing this already; some would be willing to do it but, as the students perceive, are simply much too busy to work with students and their journals in a regular or systematic way. A solution here might be to set up regular small-group discussions of students (e.g. on study days), focused on journal entries, with a teacher available. Students would always have the choice of what to select for discussion.

Handling personal issues

From the teachers' perspectives, there were many comments about the need for clarification and staff development in the area of responding to students' personal reactions to their clinical experience, either brought to the surface through the journal or from class discussion.

This is not new to nurse teachers; many have been dealing with such problems ever since they became teachers. And, as one teacher pointed out, you do not have to be going through a journal or sitting in a reflective group for a student to bring out a difficult personal problem. The emphasis on reflection in helping students to link theory and practice has, however, brought the difficulties out into the open. The research interviews showed that, in spite of reflection skills being new to some teachers, there was a wealth of existing expertise amongst other colleagues on how to deal with reflection sensitively and when to refer any problems on. The need is to share this experience (as happened in the group discussions set up as part of this research). Many of the most experienced teachers still asked for further help from 'experts' to develop their skills more. Staff development experiences (not necessarily courses) would be welcomed.

2.9 Functions and value of group support for learning

Students and teachers in both study centres talked about the support they obtained from their peer group.

Student group support

For some students the support came from friends – especially in areas related to personal problems:

> *'In our group, if one of us has a problem, we go to a friend.'*
>
> *'Say you were homesick, I'd rather talk to a friend. You have to be able to get rid of problems before you can develop.'*
>
> SCB.SL3

Others felt that regular informal small-group sessions would be most helpful:

> *'You learn more with group discussion – with other people.'*
>
> *'If we had an informal session, sitting down over a cup of coffee, a few biscuits, we'd find it much more valuable than the journal. You get to write down the journal, but you don't get the expressions out as much as you wish. It's probably because we can't express ourselves really. It's only verbally; no-one's going to hear it unless you're going to tell someone.'*
>
> *'Then little things get dealt with before they become big things.'*
>
> *'You think there's pressure on you and it affects everything – your mind, your personal life, your work – affects everything!'*
>
> SCB.SL3

Those who had experienced small-group work with a teacher had found this productive:

> *'You do find people will openly support other people in the group.'*
>
> *'Sometimes you don't even know or think someone will support you, and then when they're talking you realise they are.'*
>
> *'When you're tackling difficult subjects it's a lot easier to do it in a smaller group, and if you try to stick to the same tutor you learn a lot. It's confidential and you feel you can express what you want.'*
>
> SCB.SL7

Teachers also expressed a need for support, with the most discussed strategy being peer support. One teacher suggested that teachers could learn skills from each other through the use of co-facilitation.

> ***'When they begin work with students they need to have the support of someone who is an experienced person who they can approach . . . like a co-facilitator. Because I don't think . . . you can just let someone loose on it because if it's inappropriate and we use very inexperienced people without the necessary support, I think it could be very dangerous for some of the students, in the sense that here you can have emotions that are raised. If you don't have people who can debrief some of these students, for example, it could have a detrimental effect.'***
>
> SCA:T1.6.6

Peer support was also recommended as a means of relieving teacher stress from problems brought to them by students:

> ***'The most difficult thing is the variety of problems they [students] tell you about and where you go with them . . . that can be enormously stressful 'cause there's nowhere for us to go with it . . . We've just started in the last couple of months or so a tutor support group and the major issue which came up was the matter of confidentiality.'***
>
> SCB:T1.8

Others felt that teacher availability and time constraints made extra meetings impossible. Nevertheless, the importance of planned support networks for both teachers and students, as well as clear ground rules, was emphasised.

2.10 The role of challenge

When we began the research, we were interested in how teachers enabled students to move on in their thinking and whether there were specific stages that students went through. During the data collection, one of the researchers commented that she had not seen much evidence of students being challenged by teachers in classroom discussion of situations, where this might have been done.

When encouraging personal development, challenge, undertaken in an atmosphere of support, can encourage an individual away from being stuck in a set of behaviours to one where problem-solving action can occur (Egan, 1982). We therefore asked teachers about the role of challenge. All those asked said they thought it was important and that they used it to some extent. Egan goes on to say that sometimes people in helping relationships 'are reluctant to place demands on others, or help others place demands on themselves.' The data give three examples of what teachers say about challenge and offer possible reasons why this may be happening.

Teachers fell into three camps when it came to approaches to challenge. First, those who avoided challenge through lack of confidence, fear of hurting the students' feelings or causing an unreasonable degree of threat:

> ***'I'm always quite wary, and don't want to push people, or make them feel threatened, but to try and encourage them into it a little bit.'***
>
> SCA:T1.2.6

Secondly, those who saw challenge as important but found it difficult:

'That's one of my bad points but I'm developing it. I think we need to be challenging them, but you need to be comfortable with that, and that's a hard step I'm still developing. It's taking a long time and it's quite hard. I challenged a learner about wearing jewellery, and told the learner how I felt about her not taking any notice of me as I had mentioned it before. I surprised myself.'

SCB.TL.2.4

Finally, those who were not afraid of challenge and saw it as an important part of their role:

'Challenge should start from the beginning. It depends on how one challenges as much as what one challenges . . . I don't use it consciously. I would challenge a student whenever I feel that there is an issue to be challenged . . . I think that with a more shy person I would probably start with less threatening challenges and then sort of move on, because it is like being safe isn't it? You are not going to put the student off completely . . . I think one chooses not to challenge . . . I do challenge in a big group as well. But I choose when to challenge, because there are times when I just don't feel in the mood to challenge anyone because I want to get on with my work with my blinkers on. I also choose not to challenge students who are identified as being quite aggressive, because I feel that they really need to do that with their personal tutor and to deal with their aggressiveness first, which is separate from having a healthy challenge and a debate where they are going to get something out of it.'

SCB.TL.10.10/11

In spite of the last teacher stating a belief in the importance of challenge, there was no documented evidence of challenge occurring in the three sessions of teaching observed with this teacher. The observer commented that this may have been because it didn't occur, or because it was so gentle it went unrecognised. This raises the question of different forms of challenge, both in the classroom and on practice placements. The teacher who got students in the classroom to 'unpack' the general terms they used – 'What do you mean by a "bad value"', etc. – was engaging them in a form of challenge, but it was not meant to be confrontational, nor pursued in depth with individuals. It was appropriate because the teacher did not know the group well, it was not a small group, and the students were at an early stage of training. Such sessions improve the students' ability to ask questions themselves and to think about their own judgements.

Another type of challenge was illustrated by a teacher in getting students to make links in physiology:

'Initially it comes from the learner, they will bring up something like when they go on to the ward environment their palms were sweaty and they felt hot and sticky. I say "OK, take that, what do you think's happening? What have you got from that?" so that they will come up with "heart beats faster". So we then can go back into the physiology of being stressed, production of adrenaline: "What other things happen with adrenaline? What other things can envelop patients? Why had there been an adrenaline surge?" You very often get this "penny clicking", you can see the penny drop, where they can relate what they're learning now to what's happened to them in the past.'

SCB.TL.1.4

Again this is based on beginning with something related from the student's experience and pursuing questioning about it. In this example the 'sweaty palms' triggers an explanation of physiological theory which is relatively impersonal. Another teacher might have chosen to explore the reasons for the fear itself, perhaps using psychological theories about loss of control and uncertainty. In this case, there is the potential for challenging the students' knowledge or exploring their own feelings more deeply.

The quoted example also illustrates another interpretation of challenge: that of adapting to the norms and expectations of a new environment, in this case a hospital ward. Here, the help students needed in order to get on with their learning in practice placements was to deal with problems of acceptance, of role definition as Dip. HE students and of organisation of their work.

Areas of uncertainty affecting learning in CFP	**Help provided by teachers through reflection sessions (and journal)**			
Acceptance in the placement. Role of Dip. HE student. Organisation of work (with preceptor).	**Describe and record** incidents; explore these further by **asking questions** about them; get **an overview of others' similar or different experiences** to give a wider context.	**Analyse** through naming type of incident and related theory; **relate to broader issues** (e.g. accountability of the nurse).	Say **what could have been done differently** (implies an understanding of others' actions and roles).	Say **how you would act in a similar type of situation in future**.

Figure 3: Types of reflection activity observed

Of the four types of reflection activity observed – describe, analyse, conjecture how it might have been different, project own behaviour for future (see Figure 3) – the first two were most frequently observed happening in the CFP, with isolated examples, at this stage, of the third and fourth. The third – looking at how an incident or situation could have been different – implies a broader understanding by students of alternative explanations and of their own perspective and those of others (e.g. patients, staff) involved. This may be where students could benefit from further challenging questions to move them on, at least after the initial settling-in phase of the programmes. Reid (1994) comments on the importance of the mentor knowing when to challenge a student and of having built up sufficient trust in the relationship to do so. She notes that:

> *'One of the concepts I found most challenging was that of challenging students! Indeed I focused on it in my own reflection. One of the strong factors that came through in my exploration was that it is closely related to giving positive feedback. The issues are related because both involve specificity about either what is effective (Gray and Gerrard, 1977) or the challenge being set. Further both flourish if the two key elements of support and challenge are present.'*
>
> *Reid, 1994, p. 43.*

This research has looked at how teachers meet the learning needs of individual students in the first eighteen months of training on two Dip. HE programmes. In particular, the focus has been on how students were helped to link theory and practice through the processes of reflection. The emphasis on enabling students to reflect on their experiences was seen as a critical element for success not only at diploma level, but also as part of ongoing staff development when students are qualified.

The project began from the perspective that the context in which students learn has a significant impact on their learning; that the ability to perceive what is needed and to respond flexibly and appropriately to different contexts is what is required of students as an outcome of the Dip. HE programmes. It was argued that previous research in higher education had shown that there were difficulties both in the definitions and the usefulness of categories of learning styles and that a broader view needed to be taken in applying the research within nurse education. The focus on how teachers enable students to reflect on their experience was seen as relevant to current concerns in teaching and learning on Dip. HE programmes and as broadening the concept of learning styles to include students' perceptions of the contexts they had to learn about – college, community and clinical. The changing environment in which teachers of nursing now operate is equally significant in how they respond to students' needs.

The findings are summarised below to give the main conclusions. These are followed by the recommendations deriving from them.

3.1 Facilitating reflection

Definitions and terminology

The formal use of 'reflection' was new to a number of established teachers and certainly new to most students. However, some teachers who found the term off-putting and did not think they were using reflection, discovered in the group discussions that some of what colleagues were describing in facilitating reflection was what they themselves were doing, but not calling reflection. Further exploration and sharing of such understandings and terminology would be beneficial.

Teachers' aims when facilitating reflection

Teachers emphasised the hope that reflection would increase understanding, develop self-awareness, enhance the ability to analyse, encourage deeper thinking and promote independence.

Teaching methods

The settings teachers were using to facilitate reflection were chiefly group sessions (up to 20 students), individual tutorials, clinical interactions and learning journals.

From observation of classes and teachers' and students' descriptions of their experiences, the teachers' approaches to reflection were characterised as the **surface** or **deep** exploration of issues, themes or concepts, directly related either to the student at a **personal** level or at an **impersonal** level. A teacher could move between different approaches depending on the circumstances and the stage of the students. Some teachers would avoid the deep–personal mode altogether.

While some teachers were rightly concerned that they or their colleagues should not get out of their depth in helping students, the CFP group teaching sessions observed in the research showed that teachers were not attempting to pursue individual problems in depth: they were operating most frequently in the surface–impersonal mode. Here they were enabling students to exchange experiences and to be clearer about how they were interpreting those experiences. By having a theme or topic for the session, individual feedback could be related to the theme and the concepts round it. Students' ability to ask relevant questions of other students and to relate their experiences to more abstract concepts was apparent by the end of the CFP. The teacher's role in fostering this in larger groups did not depend on working at a personal level with individuals. The deep–personal mode was more appropriate to small-group and one-to-one teaching.

Tutorials and small groups were seen as particularly helpful to students in focusing on their experiences and enabling them to make sense of them. The opportunities for small-group work were limited, however, given teachers' workloads and the numbers of students on the programmes. The tutorial system was also very stretched where there were several cohorts of students. Some teachers were giving up lunch breaks and working long hours in order to see students individually, but still not feeling satisfied that they were giving enough time. One of the researchers described the teachers as using the 'busy gait' (Hawker, 1982) normally seen on clinical wards as they hurried about the college. Students were aware of the busy-ness of teachers and this could be a barrier to their initiating discussion.

Students who had what they perceived as difficult clinical experiences to assimilate needed listening time from teachers, a scarce resource which teachers were doing their best to distribute, sometimes at the expense of their own breathing spaces.

Teachers gave instances of **linking theory and practice** which were most readily achieved when they were in the clinical areas and the immediacy of a patient's problems made the theory come alive for the student. Although teaching staff were generally committed to supporting learning in practice placements, multiple demands made it difficult to achieve. Simultaneously, the new 'cost effective' ethos of the practice placements made it difficult for the professional practitioners to fulfil this function. The question of whether reflection during practice was being sufficiently 'role modelled' for students in the practice placements also concerned teachers. However, students' concerns on the CFP were most likely to be about their role in the placements, their actual programme and getting the support they needed. These concerns delayed coming to grips with the knowledge and skills required.

It was not within the brief of this research to examine teaching in the practice placements, but it is relevant to ask whether students witness reflective practice there that reinforces what their teachers are doing in the college.

The use of **learning journals** as a means of helping students to record their experiences so as to aid reflection is now more commonly practised. The research data indicated that, like other parts of the curriculum, students have to learn how to use them to gain benefit. In order to be able to employ the journal as a personal learning tool, preparation and follow-up were needed; it was not usually sufficient to assume they would just get on with it. The concern of some staff was of being intrusive into personal reflections and therefore some rarely saw what students had recorded. Student data from the CFP, however, showed that the journals could be seen as low priority and not very valuable as an activity if they were not followed up by teachers. It was a pity not to use what was written as a teaching aid which could, for example, help students to move from superficial description to analysis. From the accounts received, much of the recorded material was not too personal to discuss, but a trusting relationship needed to be built up with the teacher for this to occur. Again, time is implied, preferably early on in the

programme, but not before students have some practice placement experience to reflect on. When such trust was established, the journal could work extremely well as a focus for discussion and development with an individual student.

Facilitating different stages of reflection

Teachers described and illustrated a sequence of four stages of reflection in helping students to link theory and practice:

1. Describing aspects of their practical experience.
2. Analysing them.
3. Understanding how the situation could have been different.
4. Seeing how they could behave in a future similar occurrence.

Clarifying a pattern of developmental progress with teaching strategies for use at each stage would be helpful for teachers. For example: types of questions which could be asked in moving students from description to analysis; methods of challenging students in moving to stages 3 and 4, i.e. from analysis to deriving alternative scenarios and future actions. These last two stages are likely to require teachers to have most skills in facilitating the personal development of students and helping them to understand their own perspectives which they will draw on as a nurse.

Teachers' willingness to challenge students at the right times to take them to the next stage was seen to require skilled handling. Some teachers confessed that they avoided doing it, some saw it as important but found it difficult, and some saw it as an important part of their role which they fulfilled competently. Nevertheless, little evidence of challenge was observed, possibly because of the size of the groups being observed and students being within the first eighteen months of the programme.

The concern voiced most often by teachers was the fear of harming students by getting into deep personal matters without sufficient knowledge and skills to deal with this. Interestingly, those teachers who were qualified and experienced in counselling were confident about taking care to avoid getting in too far, for example by planning strategies and referral, rather than emphasising their own skills in dealing with the situation themselves. The sharing of such information with others as part of staff development would be of value.

Teacher support

Teachers expressed the need for peer support in new situations, co-facilitation in relating to new teaching techniques, and co-counselling in relation to the distress and conflict which students often shared with them.

3.2 Student learning

The development of study skills and exploration of learning styles

Dip. HE students enter the programme from a variety of academic backgrounds: some may have experience of recent independent study, some may still be very dependent and others may have left a study environment many years ago. They need effective organisational, study and writing skills to adapt to the requirements of study in higher education. A formal study skills package, supported by individual help, appeared to be most effective. But there should be follow-up of the development of students' study skills throughout the CFP; the impact soon faded when one-off sessions were bolted on to the front of the programme and not revisited.

In the college context, students' approaches were influenced by their expectations of the programme, which varied considerably. Some expected more, some less academic content; some had difficulty perceiving the relevance of parts of the academic content and community visits. Perceptions of relevance and interest were very important to the students and there was a tendency to dismiss sessions which were not obviously relevant or interesting. Some students also avoided content which seemed difficult.

In the clinical context, students had high expectations of the preceptors allocated to them in clinical practice. However, in reality many students felt insufficiently supported and helped in their practice placements and some experienced a considerable drop in their confidence as a result. They commented on finding the pace and the ethos of the two learning environments very different.

Students' needs, stages of development and learning style

Students' intellectual and professional development seemed to progress through a series of crises or transitions. Teachers' awareness of these transitional phases helped the students in coming to terms with them.

Overall, it appeared that help was needed by the students in relation to problems of acceptance in their practice placements, in establishing the new role definition of Dip. HE students and in the organisation of their work – both in the college and in their practice placements settings.

The function and value of group support for learning

Students in both study centres talked about the value of support from their peer group. For some students the support came from friends, especially in relation to personal problems. Others found informal small-group sessions most helpful; these enabled them to share their feelings and thoughts with colleagues and teachers in a safe environment.

3.3 Institutional context

The pressures on staffing, on time and the considerable changes being experienced by education institutions, made it difficult for teachers to spend the time they wanted to in helping students individually. Clear policies and commitment to making time for reflection to help students link theory and practice would be welcomed; but also, further support in identifying and sharing good practice to enhance the effectiveness of existing time available would be valuable.

1. Support for students

1.1 Specific attention should be given to the study skills necessary for higher education. A study skills package, which can be explained at the beginning and referred to throughout the Common Foundation Programme, as and when necessary, is helpful to both student and teacher.

Recommending potential students with no recent study experience to attend study skills courses or access courses to higher education prior to entering the Dip. HE could also be beneficial.

1.2 The Jowett, Walton and Payne (1994) report on the implementation of Project 2000 found that programmes tend to be over-taught and over-assessed. There is an argument for releasing time from the 'taught' elements of the curriculum so that students can reflect, digest and assimilate new material and experiences effectively. This could be achieved through increasing the periods available for tutorials and reflection in small groups. This needs to be structured round group tasks or themes if it is to be purposeful.

1.3 As reflection is new to so many students, guidance is needed on the nature and purposes of reflection and its role in linking theory and practice.

2. Support for teachers

2.1 The expertise which already exists among nurse teachers needs to be more widely shared within their institutions as well as outside. In particular, shared understanding of:

- **2.1.1** The various definitions and interpretations of reflection.
- **2.1.2** The stages of development of reflective processes, both in relation to Dip. HE learning by students and for teachers themselves.
- **2.1.3** The different teaching/facilitation techniques that can be used.
- **2.1.4** The different modes of teaching (deep/surface; personal/impersonal).
- **2.1.5** The role of challenging questions at different stages.
- **2.1.6** Controlling situations and providing safety nets.

2.2 Counselling skills training also needs to be available to teachers in view of the 'emotional labour' element of nursing. This could be in the form of in-house or contracted facilitative training.

2.3 Teachers already confident and experienced in facilitating reflection have expressed a concern to enhance their skills further through some form of 'expert supervision'. Where resources allow, this may be a good investment, as they could facilitate colleagues' work in future. Accreditation of their skills should be encouraged.

3. Institutional commitment

3.1 If student learning is to be facilitated through reflection, the college needs to make a clear commitment to:

3.1.1 Provide clear guidelines for teachers and students about what is expected.

3.1.2 Allow time in the curriculum.

3.1.3 Allow time for individual students to have timetabled opportunities to reflect on theory and practice links through tutorials, small groups and peer-group work.

Advocating more time for students to reflect on practice is only helpful if that time is well planned and facilitated by teachers with a clear idea of the developmental points to be aimed for and how to achieve them. Support for this and development for teachers will be difficult to find without the strong commitment by the institution and reductions in time spent elsewhere in the curriculum.

3.2 The provision of guidelines on the use of learning journals is recommended so that they can be used effectively as a teaching and learning tool and the teachers' role in working with the students on journal material agreed and clarified.

The guidelines could cover the issues of selecting critical incidents, describing and analysing, conjecturing and proposing future actions, timing, confidentiality and assessment; yet should not be too prescriptive. The emphasis could be on describing and analysing in the earlier part of the programme, and conjecturing and proposing future actions later, when the students have more knowledge of alternative approaches and resources.

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Initial research questions

Questions

What are tutors currently doing?

What would they like to do?

Group one – preparation

How are students prepared for reflective learning?

What study skills are they given and by whom?

What sense do they make of the preparation?

Which strategies are they introduced to intended to encourage them to reflect?

Are goals make explicit?

Do the learners understand them?

Are learning contracts used?

Group two – experience

Are there goals? If so are these long term or short term? Are they the teachers' or learners' goals?

To what extent do teaching approaches reflect purposive activities? Are approaches retrospective (totally reflective) or proactive?

Is the purposive activity totally planned, spontaneous, or a mixture ?

Which teaching methods do individual teachers use Didactic – Experiential ?

Which strategies are used to enable learners to reflect ?

Are students learning difficulties diagnosed? How, and to what extent are these and the assumptions students hold explored?

How is development measured? What assumptions do teachers make about e.g. stages in the process and end points?

To what extent and in what ways are individuals responsive to each other, in the classroom, to the learners, and the project?

Is there a 'culture' in specific classroom settings? Does the 'culture' encourage dependency or is ability to move people on demonstrated?

What theoretical models do teachers use, and how?

Group three – reflection

Which strategies do teachers use to encourage reflective processes ?

Are reflective journals used? If so, how? What information is shared? Are journals monitored? How often? By whom? Are critical incidents explored? Is there discussion and feedback? What is the nature of this? How are learning contracts managed? What links are made between the knowledge gained from reflective processes, and the development of learning contracts?

Are individual tutorials included in strategies to encourage reflection?

What is the frequency and duration of these?

What activities do these include?

Is the end point held by teachers too advanced for 18–20 year old learners?

Appendix 2

Teacher interview schedule

Who do you teach?

Which subject/s do you teach?

What is your definition of reflection?

Which theorists underpin your approach?

How do you approach reflection when working with students?
- explore strategies, what, when, where, how, ask for examples

What sort of issues does this raise?
- for the teacher?, for the student? explore, ask for examples

How are these dealt with?
- where? in the classroom? during tutorials?
  - is there a formal tutorial system?
  - how does this work? examples
  - what issues arise? examples

How do you help learners link theory to theory, and theories to practice?

What part does reflection play in that?

What do you hope the end point will be?

What expectations do learners have?
- how do they react to these experiences?
- how do they change over time?

What preparation do learners have for the reflective process?

What else do you think they need?

Are journals used? How? explore, ask for examples

Is there anything else you would like to say about reflection?

Appendix 3

Student interview schedule

Demographic data Intake dates Length in training Male Female, Numbers Age range Any previous experience?	**Study skills** How are you finding the course so far? What study skills input? Where? What do you focus on? How do you focus? What strategies do you use to help? How do you manage your study? Which learning styles do you use? For what?
Journals How are you getting on with keeping a journal? Does it help? If so, in what ways? Are there any difficulties? If so what? How do you manage these? Any other comments?	**Reflection** What previous knowledge of reflection? Any theoretical knowledge of reflection? What part does reflection play in your learning? When, where and why do you use it? Are there any difficulties? If so, what?
IPS teaching How are you finding the IPS teaching sessions so far? What do you expect for the future? What value do they have?	**General** How does the course fit with your expectations? Explore, ask for examples In what ways would you like it to be different? Is there anything else you would like to say?

ACTIVITY	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
Study Centre A ACCESS ***Study Centre B***	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→	→
TUTOR INTERVIEWS GROUP			Study Centre A 18th ***Study Centre B 21st***	Study Centre A 4th 17th						***Study Centre B 16th***			
TUTOR INTERVIEWS INDIVIDUAL				Study Centre A 10th 18th 25th x 2	Study Centre A 1st ***Study Centre B 2nd x 4*** Other 7th		Study Centre A 22nd ***Study Centre B 2nd 9th 22nd 23rd***		***Study Centre B 11th***				
STUDENT INTERVIEWS GROUP							***Study Centre B 23rd***	***Study Centre B 14th x 2***	***Study Centre B 5th 11th 15th 18th***			Study Centre A 11th	Study Centre A 10th
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS					Study Centre A 2nd 8th ***Study Centre B 2nd***		***Study Centre B 8th 9th 22nd 29th***	Study Centre A 1st ***Study Centre B 1st***	Study Centre A 30th ***Study Centre B 5th 15th 17th 18th***	Study Centre A 6th		***Study Centre B 28th***	
Study Centre A TRANSCRIPTION ***Study Centre B***				→	→	→	→ →	→	→	→	→	→	→
Study Centre A ANALYSIS ***Study Centre B***		→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →	→ →
Project meetings/ Steering Group	30th	16th	4th	4th 7th	1st 16th 30th		16th 30th (SG)	29th	4th 19th 25th	21st	7th 28th (SG)	25th	4th 11th 24th

Appendix 5

Key to abbreviations

Throughout the document where data are referenced the following codes apply:

SCA Study Centre A

SCB Study Centre B

TI Tutor interview followed by an interview number and page number

SI Student interview

FN Fieldnotes followed by a page number where applicable

CO Classroom observation

GI Group interview

Quotation of direct speech: In this report the convention has been adopted for the quotation of direct speech to be shown with single quotation marks.

RESEARCHING
PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION

A series from the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Learning Styles and Facilitating Reflection

Carolyn Miller
Anne Tomlinson
Margaret Jones

This report has been written to make the results and implications of Board commissioned research readily available to policy makers, managers, practitioners, researchers and educators. The Board's intention is to enable these key stakeholders to have access to important findings from which to plan and implement developments in nursing, midwifery and health visiting education.

'Learning Styles and Facilitating Reflection' focuses on how students reflect on their experience of diploma of higher education programmes and on how teachers perceive students' reflective activity and facilitate their associated learning needs.

The report makes a number of specific recommendations about support for students and teachers and about how institutional commitment can be re-inforced.

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

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